The Making of the Sermon

Pattison

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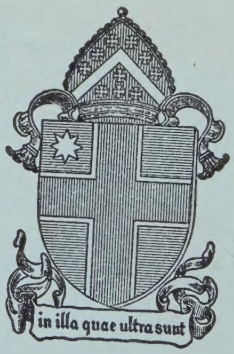

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The making of the sermon : for the class-room and the study

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THE MAKING OF THE SERMON

THE MAKING OF THE SERMON

FOR THE CLASS-ROOM AND THE STUDY

BY

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"*The History of the English Bible*," *etc.*

"The royal ordinance of Preaching"

—*Edward Irving*

Philadelphia

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PREFACE

THE title of this book sufficiently indicates its purpose. While intended primarily for the use of the student in the class-room, I have also written it with an eye to a still wider audience. I trust that it may be of use to some ministers who have not taken a seminary course, and also to many more whose class-room work, receding year by year, threatens, by the lapse of time and by the pressure of many duties needing their immediate attention, to become a faint and ineffectual memory.

It is perhaps inevitable, unless he guards himself against it most jealously, that the preacher should become a slave to the tyranny of his own habits of pulpit preparation. This is due to many causes: to the absorbing claims of pastoral work, which often leaves neither the time nor the vigor which is needed, if new methods are to be tried; to the dread of making any material change in habits which have come to be so much a part of himself; and to the almost breathless frequency with which Sundays recur, suggesting that they are somehow independent of the calendar that regulates the other days of the week. Amid the swift succession of his various engagements he is tempted to fall back on Abraham Lincoln's favorite counsel,

not to swap horses while crossing a stream, and to decide that in the making of his sermons whatever is, is best. Under these circumstances it is only the preacher of a resolute mind and a highly conscientious nature who can be depended on to make any material advance in his way of preparing to preach. No man is in greater danger of becoming formal—I will not say fossilized—than is the ordinary preacher. Even when the happy experiences of his pastorate keep his heart young, there may be no springtime in his habits of thought. Every true preacher will bear me witness that there are times when he resents the monotony of his work; not that he is tired of it, but only, as George Whitefield said so pathetically, that he is tired in it. Unconsciously to himself, perhaps, he furnishes a fresh illustration of the truth of Lord Bacon's weighty words: "A man would die, though he was neither valiant nor miserable, only upon a weariness to do the same thing so oft over and over."

One cure for this wearisome trend in his pulpit preparation he may find in frequently reviewing his course and revising his methods. The business of preaching fulfills itself in many ways, and we are wise if, even though it be at the cost of betraying some lack of ease as we strike into them, we now and then resolve to explore the unbeaten paths of our vocation.

No one method of preparing or delivering a sermon is so certainly the best method that the

preacher can afford to neglect all others. "Still learning," the brave words with which Michael Angelo in extreme old age faced the snows of a Roman winter in order that he might study afresh the lines of the Colosseum, may well be the motto of all true workers, of ourselves among the rest.

Although we may be disposed to challenge the implication which it contains, I think we may all join in Thomas Carlyle's sentiment when he wrote: "I wish he could find the point again—this speaking one, and stick to it with tenacity, with deadly energy—for there is need of him yet."

Rather than encumber the pages of the book with the many formal divisions needed in the classroom, I have prefixed to each chapter a summary of its contents, analyzed for the benefit of the student. For the index which may better answer the purposes of the ordinary reader, I am indebted to the generous offices of my friend, the Rev. R. Kerr Eccles, M. D., of Bowling Green, Ohio.

T. H. P.

Rochester, May, 1898.

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WHAT IS PREACHING?

SUMMARY

DEFINITION. Preaching is the spoken communication of divine truth with a view to persuasion.

I. THE MATTER OF PREACHING. "DIVINE TRUTH."

1. The limit of preaching. It must be the proclamation and enforcement of divine truth: (1) The delivery of a message from God to man; (2) The message must concern itself with religion; (3) It should be founded upon Scripture; (4) It must be in sympathy with both God and man.
2. The extent of preaching. Divine truth cannot be all communicated in one sermon. With many doctrines of the Christian religion the sermon may deal only indirectly. Narrow views of the scope of the sermon deprecated.
3. The authority for preaching. Concerned with positive truth. The pulpit no place for intellectual doubts, for matters purely speculative, or for negations. Its true mission.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE COMMUNICATION IS MADE.

It is "spoken." Demands, speaker and an audience.

1. As to the speaker: (1) It is the will of God that truth shall be communicated in this way; (2) It is also natural.
2. As to the audience: (1) The audience must be kept in view while the sermon is being prepared; (2) The audience must be respected. The preacher who fails to gain the attention of his hearers should ask himself: (*a*) Have I felt the importance of my vocation? (*b*) Have I preached upon subjects of human interest? (*c*) Have I made suitable preparation? (3) The audience should be interested at once; (4) The interest should be maintained to the end.

III. THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING. "WITH A VIEW TO PERSUASION."

The principal kinds of pulpit address:

1. Familiar discourse. Two words used for this in the New Testament, "talked," "preached."
2. Rhetorical discourse. Two words used for this in the New Testament. Both translated "preach."
3. Argumentative discourse. New Testament word for this. Other words employed for preaching in the New Testament, "teaching," "testifying," "beseeching."

I

WHAT IS PREACHING?

PREACHING is the spoken communication of divine truth with a view to persuasion. Accepting this as a sufficient definition, we notice that it covers the three points with which we are chiefly concerned in a sermon, namely: its matter, its manner, and its purpose. As to the matter of this communication, it is "divine truth." This tells us what to preach. As to the manner of this communication, it is divine truth "spoken." This tells us how to preach. As to the purpose of this communication, it is divine truth spoken "with a view to persuasion." This tells us why we preach.

The Matter of Preaching

I. Turning first to the matter of preaching, we say that it must be "divine truth." We find here the limit and the extent of preaching, as well as its authority.

1. What then is the limit of Christian preaching? Christian preaching is limited to the proclamation and enforcement of the truth of God. Strictly speaking, it is not arguing, still less is it speculating about truth.

(1) Simply it is the delivery of a message from God to man. The two great pulpit orators of a

hundred years ago, Robert Hall and Thomas Chalmers, discovered this only after they had struck other notes in vain. In the early days of his ministry Robert Hall, as he himself tells us, imitated Robert Robinson, his fascinating predecessor at Cambridge. Chalmers built up splendid apologies for a Christian system in which he himself only half believed. It was when these methods were exchanged for the simpler proclamation of the truth of God that alike Hall and Chalmers found their vocation. So of Mr. Spurgeon it has been said, "To him Christianity was not an argument, but a message; not something to be discussed, but something to be delivered by the preacher and instantaneously accepted by the hearer."

The preacher who does his work under this persuasion will be saved from two evils. He will get rid of the painful self-consciousness with which many speakers are afflicted. He may not rise indeed to the heroic condition of Archbishop Whately who, when he was asked whether he was nervous on the occasion of his first sermon, answered, "I dared not be. To think of myself at such a time would be in my eyes not only a weakness, but a sin." But he will be likely to attain the safer spirit which moved Adolphe Monod to begin one of his sermons with the prayer: "O my God, give me thy Spirit, that so I may lay down at the foot of the cross of thy Son that searching of myself and that disquietude which have overcome me for

these three days, to the detriment of my sermon." Convinced that he is the messenger of God, he will also be delivered from a slavish and time-serving spirit. That no man can serve two masters is nowhere truer than it is in the pulpit. There one is our master, even Christ. "Out of the pulpit," John Knox said to Mary Queen of Scots, when she complained that never had prince been handled as she was by him in his sermons, "few had occasion to be offended with him; but there he was not master of himself, but bound to obey Him who commanded him to speak plainly, and to flatter no flesh on the face of the earth."

(2) A further limitation is that Christian preaching concerns itself with religion. We may refuse to put any narrow or dogmatic interpretation upon the term "religion"; but nothing can take the place of the thing itself in our sermons. It was the severest condemnation which Louis XVI. of France passed upon one of his chaplains when he said, "This preacher would have left nothing out of his sermon if he had happened to touch upon religion." The preacher is called to preach the gospel of Christ, and not to lecture on literature or politics or economical questions. The warning given by Dr. John Watson is especially needed at a time when the temptation to forget this seems to be as plausible as it is subtle: "When under the shadow of a great trouble or in the throes of a terrible temptation, little consolation or help will be gained from a discourse on drains or a pulpit

review of the latest popular book." "I do not go to church," said Daniel Webster, after enduring the infliction of an ambitious but useless sermon, "to learn history, but to be reminded of duty." The famous orator was of the same mind as a worshiper in Westminster Abbey, who complained after listening to a sermon from Dean Stanley, "I went to hear the way to heaven; I was told the way to Palestine."

(3) We mention another limitation when we add that our preaching should be founded upon Scripture, and not upon its words so much as upon its doctrines. The old Puritan saying, "You cannot give God's children too much of their Father's bread," expressed a truth to which all the history of the church bears witness. The Protestant Reformation, reviving the popular faith in the supreme authority of the Bible, insisted simultaneously upon the paramount necessity for making the truth revealed therein the staple of the message of the pulpit.

(4) It follows that the sermon must be in very close touch both with God and man. As Tholuck said, a sermon ought to have "heaven for its father and earth for its mother." Looking at the circumstances of our daily life exclusively in the light which springs from below, or failing to bring heavenly realities down "to men's business and bosoms," many a sermon carries in itself the assurance of failure. The true preacher must be "great not in wealth of eloquence alone, or profundity of

learning, not in charm of style only, or justness of expression, but great with the effective greatness of power to bring the infinite remedy of the pity of God into close contact with the infinitely varied needs of man."

2. We are still dealing with the matter of preaching when we glance at its extent. Beware of taking narrow views here. Preaching is the communication of divine truth to man, and just because the ocean is so vast and his vessel so small no sailor should attempt to compass his task in one voyage. The young preacher, like the young traveler, is apt to attempt too much; and in both cases, the result is the same. A confused impression of many things referred to or suggested takes the place of one compact thought. The speaker has been so anxious to say everything that he has really said nothing. As Daniel Webster complained of an opponent in the court, he has "hovered but not pitched." When the Spaniards would describe a tedious writer they say, "He leaves nothing in his inkstand." So the preacher often fails because he leaves nothing for next time. To begin in the Garden of Eden and close only in the New Jerusalem is the weakness of many a sermon which would achieve more if it attempted less. A sermon may deal by implication only, or only indirectly, with many of the doctrines of Christianity—with the fall of man, the redemption of Christ, the dispensation of the Spirit, for example, and yet be a sermon.

3. The authority for the sermon lies in the fact that the preacher is a messenger who delivers to his congregation the word of God. "That's the man for me," David Hume remarked when he heard Ebenezer Erskine. "He means what he says; he speaks as if Jesus Christ was at his elbow."

Because he is charged with God's message to men, the preacher is concerned with positive truth.

(1) The pulpit is no place in which to ventilate intellectual doubt. "Give me the benefit of your convictions if you have any," was the demand of Goethe, "but keep your doubts to yourself, for I have enough of my own."

(2) Nor should the sermon deal with matters purely speculative. The dogmatic tone is the right tone for a preacher so long as he speaks with the accent of conviction. His reason for being in the pulpit is that he has the word of the Lord to deliver to his hearers.

(3) Nor, again, is the sermon to be negative in its character. The sermon which is occupied chiefly with saying what the text does not mean, provokes, indeed, but not to love or to good works. "You must preach positively, telling your hearer what is true, setting God before his heart, and bidding it know its Lord."[1] By all means study the sermons of the New Testament, and especially those in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. "The glorious fact, 'By this man is preached unto

[1] Phillips Brooks.

you the forgiveness of sins,' is the burden of every sermon." [1]

II. Recalling our definition of preaching as "the spoken communication of divine truth," we come, next, to the manner in which this communication is made. It is "spoken." This distinguishes it from other ways in which truth may be communicated to men, such as the ordinances and ritual of religion; the arts of music and painting; the printed page; or even the simple force of Christian example.

The Manner of Preaching

It demands two things, namely, a speaker and an audience.

1. As to the speaker. That man should be reached by the medium of human speech is the will of God.[2]

(1) This seems to be conclusively shown by the whole history of preaching. Notwithstanding the assertions to the contrary which are made by the Romanist and the Ritualist, we believe with one of the most devoted bishops of the Episcopal Church that "this age wants and is prepared to receive not the priest, but the prophet." [3] It will be well to turn at this point to the testimony of the first days of Christianity. Nowhere was there an appeal to sacraments, or to the scenic effect of splendid ceremonials, or to any set form of service. The sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost gave to the church the manner in which the

[1] McCheyne. [2] Rom. 10 : 4. [3] Bishop Fraser.

message from heaven was to reach the hearts of men. "With many words did he testify and exhort." [1]

(2) We also remark that it is most natural that divine truth should be communicated by speech. Men are likely to be touched and affected by their fellow-men. No doubt for this among other reasons it was that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." "Eloquence," as Emerson says, "is the appropriate organ of the highest personal energy." Four things may here be said as to the preacher himself: (*a*) He should be thoroughly human. Luther tried to preach so as to suit the poor women, children, and servants. Roger Ascham said, "We ought to think like great men and speak like common people." As Channing grew to the pulpit his address constantly "became less ministerial and more manly." "To me," says Longfellow, "a sermon is no sermon in which I cannot hear the heart beat." Beecher held that preaching was "the application of personal emotion and thought to living people; the power of one living man to lay himself on the heart and intelligence of another." (*b*) The preacher should be naturally qualified to speak. Training may do much, but the true preacher like the true poet is born before he is made. (*c*) He

[1] Acts 2 : 40. See also Acts 8 : 4, 12; 10 : 36; 11 : 19, 20; 15 : 35; 20 : 25; 28 : 31; Rom. 16 : 25; 1 Cor. 1 : 18–21; 1 Cor. 2 : 4; 2 Cor. 10 : 14; Gal. 1 : 23; 2 Tim. 4 : 17; Titus 1 : 3.

should be morally and spiritually qualified to speak the message of God to man. Preaching is a divine ordinance; and beaten oil is called for in the service of the sanctuary. Nothing else can take the place of consecrated character. Gladstone, recalling the far-distant day when he listened to Chalmers, says: "I never heard any one preach who more completely conveyed his own moral character through the medium of every sentence he spoke." (*d*) He should be satisfied to deliver his message. Personal ambition, self-consciousness, a striving after display, should all be excluded from the pulpit. Hazlitt remarks about Rembrandt's picture of "Jacob's Ladder," that had the painter thought once about himself or anything but the subject, "the dream had fled, the spell had been broken." The preacher must hide behind his message, for "the most effective preaching consists not only in words about the Lord, but, in a sense, of words from the Lord. The most difficult and important duty of the preacher's self-discipline is self-effacement." [1]

2. As to the audience, it seems to me of the first importance that the preacher keep his congregation well in view during the preparation of his sermon.

(1) It will be wise in him to remember Patrick Henry's words and apply them to his own vocation. "Sir, it is not books, it is men that we must study." Robert Hall held that without being per-

[1] Joseph Cook.

sonal a good sermon should be composed so that the conscience of the audience should feel the hand of the preacher searching it, and every individual know where to class himself; and Henry Ward Beecher uttered a truth which any preacher who is tempted to isolate himself in his study must lay to heart, when he said, "I dedicated myself not to be a fisher of ideas nor of books, but a fisher of men." At first it will be a difficult thing to realize an audience which is not present. But by constant practice it becomes easy. Guthrie spoke each sentence aloud before writing it down, and in that way acquired an admirable pulpit style. In his hours of composition he managed to keep an audience always before him, and "realized the influence of a crowd even in the solitude of his study."

(2) The audience must be respected. When a congregation is listless, indifferent, and hard to interest, the temptation is strong with the preacher to lay the blame at every door sooner than at his own. But he should reflect that preaching is oratory, and oratory is an art which always and everywhere delights; and that preaching deals with religion, and religion (as Thomas Binney was wont to say) is what people care most to hear about. Let him rather look nearer home, and ask, Have I felt the importance of my vocation? "It is no light thing to speak before men in the place of God."[1] The man who could say with reason

[1] Luther.

of his clergyman, diligent everywhere but in his parish, "Our minister makes a by-job of our souls," passed the severest sentence to which any preacher can expose himself. If he has failed to feel the importance of his vocation he will very likely neglect his pulpit preparation; and in that case he may deserve the retort with which an easy-going preacher was met when he boasted one morning at the breakfast table that he had already written a sermon and killed a salmon: "It may be so; but I had rather eat your salmon than hear your sermon." Possibly he has fallen into an error at which we have already glanced, and chosen for his themes subjects of no vital human interest. A book was found not long since in one of the rooms of Exeter Cathedral which dated from about 1301, and contained, among other things, the complaints of attendants at public worship. One vicar was criticised because his preaching was "very poor and after a fashion of his own"; while of another it was reported that "he did not inform his hearers very much." The critics of our sermons still find only too much reason for urging these ancient objections.

(3) Let me add that the preacher should endeavor to interest his hearers at once. What Hooker says of extemporaneous sermons is true of all sermons, however composed and delivered; "They spend their lives at their birth." By his manner in the pulpit, and by the way in which he conducts the service even before the sermon

is reached, let the preacher come into sympathetic touch with his congregation. The space granted to him is short in which "to invite men drenched in time to recover themselves, and come out of time and taste their native immortal air."[1] To quote a few words from a noble passage in John Ruskin's "Stones of Venice," the whole of which should be read: "When breathless and weary with the week's labor they give the preacher this interval of imperfect and languid hearing, he has but thirty minutes to get at the separate hearts of a thousand men, to convince them of all their weaknesses, to shame them from all their sins, to warn them of all their dangers, to try, by this way and that, to stir the hard fastenings of those doors where the Master himself has stood and knocked, yet none opened, and to call at the openings of those dark streets where Wisdom herself has stretched forth her hands, and no man regarded. Thirty minutes to raise the dead in!"[2] What the preacher does must indeed be done quickly.

(4) This interest the preacher must aim to hold to the very close of his discourse. Let him make his sermon an articulated whole; let him cultivate rhetorical climax; let him see to it that his composition cumulates in force and closeness of application as it draws near to its close; and when it is finished let him ask himself whether it has in it a message to each part of the entire nature. Guth-

[1] R. W. Emerson, "Life," p. 308.
[2] "The Stones of Venice," Vol. II., p. 25.

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rie demanded in every sermon what he called "the three P's," Proving, Painting, Persuading. In other words, let the preacher address the reason, the imagination, and the heart. The sermon which lacks in any one of these three is sure to fail in interesting some hearers.

III. More briefly we may now deal with the purpose of preaching. The sermon is framed "with a view to persuasion."

The Purpose of Preaching

1. The aim which the preacher sets before him is the salvation and upbuilding of his hearers. We prefer to say this rather than to lay the chief stress upon the obligation to believe under which the preaching of the gospel indisputably places those who hear it. The emphasis is on interest rather than on duty; the voice which speaks is the voice of love rather than of law. "The teaching of Christ and the apostles was that God wanted all men to be saved, and made overtures to them."[1] This alone does justice to the spirit of the New Testament, and to the happy phrase, "An instinct for souls,"[2] which has been offered as a definition of the preacher's vocation from the day of Pentecost until now. Let the sermon record the achievements of this instinct. It may even be well that occasionally during his ministry the preacher keep a record of the reason why every sermon is prepared. Each discourse will then be the embodiment and expression of a definite purpose.

[1] H. W. Beecher. [2] E. Paxton Hood.

2. In order to persuade men to believe, every form of discourse must be used. The New Testament gives us three distinct kinds of pulpit address. The first is familiar discourse, or what we understand as the homily. This is that easy and graceful conversation to which so few preachers attain. It does not condescend to words of low estate. It is as free from vulgarity as it is from commonplace. The perfect mastery of this style marks the preacher who wields the most effective eloquence. Of Francis of Assisi, his disciple, Thomas of Spalato, said, "He had not the manner of a preacher, his ways were rather those of a conversation"; and Butler, in "Hudibras," meant it as no sarcasm when he wrote of one of his characters:

> And when with greatest art he spoke
> You'd think he talked like other folk.

For this familiar kind of discourse, two words are used in the New Testament, translated "talked"[1] and "preached."[2] Upon this first word the conception of the homily is based, and the preacher must keep it in mind as best describing what the staple of his sermon work should be.

The second kind of pulpit address is rhetorical discourse, a more formal, studied, and impassioned declaration of God's will. This again is represented by two words, both translated "preach" in our English Bible. The first, which is used

[1] Acts 20 : 11. [2] Mark 2 : 2; John 4 : 26, 27.

fifty times, means to announce, and is found, for example, in Matt. 11 : 5, "the poor have the gospel preached to them"; the second, which is used sixty times, carries the idea of the proclamation of a message, as in Mark 16 : 15, "preach the gospel to every creature."

A third and less frequent kind of pulpit address is that which puts the chief stress on the argument; and is rendered in our version either "preached" or "reasoned." With Felix Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," [1] and it was under argumentative preaching that Eutychus fell into a deep sleep, which may perhaps account for the fact that when the young man was brought to life again Paul "talked" a long while.[2] Familiar discourse will hold the attention when more elaborate argument acts as an almost fatal soporific.

Besides these words, the Bible indicates "teaching," [3] "testifying," [4] and "beseeching" [5] as other forms of discourse. By no one of all these to the exclusion of the others should the preacher approach the walls of Mansoul and summon the occupant to surrender. With the even level of familiar address let him talk and teach; in more precise forms of speech let him reason of the great truths of salvation; now and again, rising into impassioned language, let him announce the good tidings, let him give rein to the impetuosity

[1] Acts 24 : 25. [2] Acts 20 : 9, 11. [3] Matt. 28 : 19.
[4] Acts 2 : 40. [5] 2 Cor. 5 : 20.

of his emotions, let him testify against those who harden their hearts before the pleadings of the divine mercy; and oftener still, as one who knows the fear of the Lord, let him persuade men, beseeching them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. "Apostolic preaching was a combination of all these processes, saturated with prayers and tears." [1]

[1] Dr. J. Angus.

THE TEXT

SUMMARY

I. Its Meaning.

1. Derivation of the word "text."
2. May include more of a passage than is read.
3. More commonly means the special words read by the preacher, from which he proposes to speak, and which are often detached from the context: (1) The theme should, as a rule, cover the whole text; (2) Yet one theme need not necessarily exhaust the text; (3) It is well that the text should form a complete rhetorical sentence.

II. The History of the Text.

1. The Jewish custom.
2. The practice of the apostles compared with that of their immediate successors.
3. Later history, "postillating" and "declaring."

III. Uses Served by the Text.

1. Disadvantages: (1) The use of a text cramps the liberty of preaching; (2) Is not favorable to the most intelligent treatment of Scripture; (3) Is artificial.
2. Advantages: (1) A cure for desultoriness; (2) Insures some reference to Scripture; (3) Carries with it a sense of authority; (4) Is not confined to preaching.

IV. The Structure of the Text.

1. Reverence demands that it form a complete sentence.
2. Yet "fractional texts" may be used.
3. As to the length of the text.
4. The text may be drawn from more than one passage: (1) Complementary texts; (2) Contrasted texts; (3) Texts made up of the same words in various connections; (4) Series of sermons on contrasted or complementary texts.

II

THE TEXT

I. The meaning of the text.

1. To recall the derivation of the familiar word "text" is to recognize the bounds which it naturally sets to the sermon. Taken from the Latin *textus*, it suggests something woven into the entire web of the discourse. Plainly it points back to a time when preaching was altogether expository, when the sermon was little more than a running comment on the scripture for the day, which in its turn formed the text.

Its Meaning

2. The text may still mean the whole passage with which the preacher proposes to deal, although he may read only a few words taken from it. Horace Bushnell's sermon on "Unconscious Influence," is prefaced by the words "Then went in also that other disciple," but in its development it is based on the entire narrative from which that fragment is taken.[1]

3. More commonly we understand by the text the special words read by the preacher as those on which he proposes to speak, and which he often wholly detaches from the context. When Guthrie discourses on "The Messenger," and takes for his

[1] John 20 : 3–8.

text, "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man,"[1] he uses the context scarcely at all.

Since the sermon is based on certain words upon which the preacher proposes to speak, it is best that the theme should, as a rule, cover the whole text. A limited use of the term "text" has anyhow the advantage that all the text can be pressed into the service of the sermon.

At the same time a single theme need not necessarily exhaust the text. In one verse in Ezekiel, Guthrie finds three themes, and from each of these he preaches a sermon.[2]

Whenever possible let the text as it is announced form a complete rhetorical sentence. To use a few fragmentary words is open to many objections, as we shall see; and certainly not the least of them is the offense to the ear, which naturally delights in the balance and harmony of sound.

II. A few words may here be devoted to the history of the text.

Its History

1. The Jewish custom was to read the Scriptures, which of themselves almost formed the discourse without any added comment. Gradually, however, partly because the language was no longer that of their daily lives, and partly because there was need to justify the additions made by the scribes to the simple law, it came to be the fashion to indulge in ex-

[1] Ezek. 36 : 16, 17. [2] Ezek. 36 : 26.

tended exposition and application. So Jesus preached in the synagogue of Nazareth;[1] and to Paul and Barnabas when worshiping at Antioch in Pisidia came the invitation from the ruler of the synagogue there, after the reading of the Scripture, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."[2]

2. The apostles, believing themselves inspired teachers, often preached without texts; and the fact that their successors did not follow their example shows that for themselves they made no such claim. Inspiration ceased, and henceforth authority was found in the use of the words of the now complete Scriptures.

3. Until the beginning of the thirteenth century the sermon was little more than an expansion of the text, itself often a long passage or even an entire book. Such preaching was called "postillating," and was distinguished from "declaring," a name given to that kind of discourse in which the speaker said what he desired to say without taking any text. In the thirteenth century the habit of preaching from a single verse, or a few verses only, became common, and very soon we find the elaborate analysis, the divisions and subdivisions, which are now so usual in the sermon. They no doubt helped the hearer to follow and remember the discourse, yet they date from the days when medieval theologians reduced all thinking to rigid and formal systems.

[1] Luke 4 : 20. [2] Acts 13 : 15.

III. This brings us to the use served by the text. Undoubtedly it has advantages, although these are not without the defects of their excellencies.

Its Use

1. Three disadvantages we must mention.

(1) The first is that a slavish adherence to a text cramps the liberty of preaching. Voltaire says with reason that for a preacher to speak at length on a brief quotation, and to make his whole discourse bear upon that, "appears to be trifling little worthy the dignity of the ministry. The text becomes a kind of motto or rather enigma, which the discourse develops."

(2) A second objection to the use of the text is that it is often fatal to the most intelligent treatment of Scripture. Chopping the Bible into fragments, the practice pursued from a host of pulpits through long centuries of abuse, leaves us amazed that the book has survived during centuries of dislocation and dismemberment. The words of Erasmus are needed still: "To get at the real meaning it is not enough to take four or five isolated words; you must look where they came from, what was said, by whom it was said, to whom it was said, at what time, on what occasion, in what words, what preceded, what follows."[1] Each clause in this wise and weighty sentence should sound the death-knell for a multitude of sermons.

(3) A third objection is that the use of the text is artificial. It tends to make preaching monoto-

[1] Seebohm's "Oxford Reformers," p. 258.

nous, unnatural, and unreal; and the step is a very short one from the unreal to the uninteresting. Indeed, what preacher has not at times found himself chafing against being forced by custom to maintain the unvarying habit of announcing his text? Certainly if it were our chief duty to bring preaching to perfection as a rhetorical exercise, we should begin by abolishing the tyranny of the text, which, like the lame beggar, demands tribute from us every time we attempt to enter the temple.

2. Yet it must be evident that the advantages of using a text are many and great.

(1) For one thing, it is a cure for desultoriness, and rescues the preacher from deserving the sneer of Sterne when he says that the excellency of a certain text is it will suit any sermon, and of a certain sermon that it will suit any text.

(2) Evidently, also, it does insure some reference to Scripture. The preacher starts well, however he may finish. So far he is bound to be true to his office as a messenger; and when he can find no text for his sermon he does well to ask himself whether the sermon ought to be preached. The "prologues" or "preludes" in which some preachers now indulge, by the very fact that they range themselves under no inspired texts, confess that they have no authority such as the genuine sermon carries with it. We may note in passing that if the sermon is to be an expansion and application of a text it seems to follow that the text must be chosen before the sermon is composed.

The late Professor Jowett, of Oxford University, said that it was his habit to write the discourse first, "and then choose a text as a peg." We need not be surprised therefore that he should hold forth in the chapel of his college on the causes of failure in the university from the words "Much study is a weariness of the flesh."[1]

(3) The use of a text has then the further advantage that it carries to the hearer a sense of authority. Uttering only the brief but terrible "word of the Lord," Elijah broke in upon Ahab in his ivory palace at Jezreel;[2] with a text from Isaiah, John the Baptist came preaching the gospel of repentance;[3] and it was with words dear to many generations of believing hearts that Jesus, in the synagogue of Nazareth, led the way to his sublime announcement, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."[4]

(4) Nor is this practice confined to the pulpit. The old philosophers detaching sentences from the writings of their famous sages, used them as texts; the orator who speaks to a toast and the statesman who previous to his address in the legislature calls for the reading of certain resolutions, both of them use texts; the musician varying the air, but at the same time preserving harmony by observing unity, finds in the *motif* of his composition his text; to the painter some familiar strain of song or some stirring scene in history furnishes a text; and when Milton opens "Paradise Lost" with the words,

[1] Eccl. 12 : 12. [2] 1 Kings 17 : 1. [3] Matt. 3 : 3. [4] Luke 4 : 21.

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,

or when Tennyson, in the first lines of "In Memoriam," holds it true with another singer that "men may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things," they only illustrate the use of the text by the greatest of our poets.

In summing up this part of our subject, let me counsel that the use of the text be preserved, although the habit should not be regarded as carrying with it any divine sanction; that where we deem it wise to do so the text may be dispensed with, and a subject announced instead, such as may very likely demand the consideration of not one only but many passages of Scripture; that occasionally the preacher does well to place his text where it seems naturally to belong, and where the old German usage puts it, namely, after the introduction of the sermon has been given; and, above all, that because he conforms to the time-honored practice of having a text, no preacher is warranted in treating it in such a way as to do violence to the context. The growing feeling at the present time is against that reckless indifference to the whole tenor and spirit of a passage which permits the preacher to make a "peg" of his text on which to hang a sermon. However richly his sermon may merit hanging, it deserves to go to its own place in some less honorable way.

IV. We pass on to consider the structure of the text.

Its Structure

1. Not alone our respect for rhetoric, but still more our respect for the Bible, demands that as a rule the text shall form a complete sentence. Verses of Scripture should not be mutilated for the sake of obtaining a striking or sensational text. There was no excuse for South, when having to preach before the Merchant Tailors' Company of the city of London, he announced as his text, "A remnant shall be saved";[1] and still less excuse for Dean Hook, when preaching before the young queen of England he founded an argument for submission to ecclesiastical authority on the words, "Hear the church." Whately was justly indignant at this priestly trifling. "By quoting slices of texts you may prove anything. Why should not some one else preach on the text thus, 'If he neglect to hear the church, let him——'?"

2. And yet so long as they do no violence to the context, what are called "fractional texts" are often impressive. "The blood of the everlasting covenant," "Whose I am," "Reconciled to God," "Unsearchable riches," illustrate a legitimate use of Scripture fragments. The conflict between faith and culture may be discussed from the words, "Thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece";[2] and the contrast between human and divine methods of action may be emphasized by the broken sentence, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth

[1] Rom. 9 : 27. [2] Zech. 9 : 13.

good wine, and . . . then that which is worse, but thou——"[1]

3. The length of the text must be determined by the theme. The main thing is to do full justice to that. A short text often arrests attention, while a long text gives an impression of fullness and authority. We hope that the frivolous fancy for excessively short texts has died out. "And Bartholomew," on which a Puritan preacher discoursed with much unction, may be more fruitful on longer acquaintance than it promises to be at first; but a score of sermons by another preacher of the same period and school on the interjection "Oh," must frequently have provoked his hearers into using the text themselves in no very gracious spirit; and the preacher who enlarged on the little word "But," when he was a candidate for an endowed lectureship, was paid in his own coin when the senior trustee met him as he left the pulpit with the remark: "You have given us a most ingenious discourse, and we are much obliged to you, *but* we hardly think you are the man we need."

4. The preacher does well occasionally to draw his text from more than one passage of Scripture.

(1) Texts which corroborate one another are often useful. The Second Commandment, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children," may fairly enough be coupled with the equally authoritative words in Ezekiel, "The son shall not bear the

[1] John 2 : 10.

iniquity of the father." That "Our God is a consuming fire," is the other half of the great truth set forth in the more familiar declaration of John, "God is love." A charge to a young pastor was founded not long since on portions of three verses in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians. "A minister of Jesus Christ" (ver. 7), "A minister of the gospel" (ver. 23), and "A minister of the church" (ver. 25). These are examples of complementary texts.

(2) Contrasted texts are equally impressive. Close to one another are the two verses which picture the Gadarenes as beseeching Jesus to depart from them and the people on the other side of the lake as gladly receiving him.[1] The futile yearning of David, "O that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away and be at rest," is answered by the invitation of David's Lord, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."[2] The merciful provision of night here may be set over against the merciful release from it hereafter.[3] That "the sea is his and he made it," does not take away from the blessedness of the future home where there shall be "no more sea."[4] The superior glory of the two dispensations may be suggested by using for a text the last words of the Old and New Testament, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse," and "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

[1] Luke 8 : 37, 40. [2] Ps. 55 : 6; Matt. 11 : 28.
[3] Ps. 104 : 20; Rev. 21 : 25. [4] Ps. 95 : 5; Rev. 21 : 1.

(3) While guarding himself against any disposition to ingenious trifling, the preacher may with advantage find his text in the same words as they are used in various connections. The "ifs" of the eleventh chapter of John stand up like the successive peaks of a mountain range.[1] Mr. Spurgeon preached a searching sermon on the words "I have sinned," as they were used by the hardened sinner Pharaoh, the double-minded Balaam, the insincere King Saul, by Achan with more remorse than repentance, by Judas in his agony of despair, by Job overwhelmed by the righteousness of God, and finally by the prodigal confessing his unworthiness to his father. Matthew Wilks, a quaint preacher of a past generation, who often pushed addresses in the pulpit to the verge of audacity, has a good sermon on the word, "Afterwards." One more plague upon Pharaoh, and afterwards he will let you go; for Esau no place of repentance afterwards, when he sought in vain the blessing once rejected; the afflictions of to-day must be looked at from the point of view of this word, for "afterwards they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness"; divine guidance in the present, and afterwards glory is the assurance for the believer; while to the impenitent there is solemn warning in the weighty clause "after death the judgment."

(4) A good series or succession of sermons may be built up on contrasted or complementary texts. "Bear ye one another's burdens"[2] may be

[1] John 11 : 9, 12, 21, 40. [2] Gal. 6 : 2, 5.

followed by "For every one shall bear his own burden." "My peace I give unto you" may suggest the question "Is it peace?" and this in its turn the remonstrance, "What hast thou to do with peace?"[1] Finney preached the complete gospel from three texts, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" and "But they made light of it."[2] It will be well for the preacher to plan such series as these, in which without formally announcing his intention, he may deal with the various aspects of some important truth.

[1] John 14 : 27; 2 Kings 9 : 17; 2 Kings 9 : 19.
[2] John 3 : 16; Heb. 2 : 3; Matt. 22 : 5.

THE TEXT—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTORY. The relation of the text to the context. The text need not necessarily call for a discussion of the context. Yet it must be so used as to do no violence to the context.

I. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE TEXT IN ITS RELATION TO THE CLAIMS OF SCRIPTURE.

1. The text must be reverently treated: (1) No excuse for the deliberate and intentional misuse of a text; (2) Unworthy motives must not influence us; (3) Care should be taken in the use of accommodated texts; (*a*) Occasionally permissible; (*b*) But as a rule not.
2. The text must be intelligently treated. The Revised version to be consulted: (1) Beware of spurious texts; (2) Study, so as not to err through ignorance; (3) Do not spiritualize texts which have no spiritual meaning; (4) Do not use the uninspired utterances of Scripture as if they were inspired.

II. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE TEXT IN ITS RELATION TO THE THEME OF THE DISCOURSE.

1. The subject-matter should, if possible, form a complete theme.
2. The text should be suitable to the theme: (1) The character of the subject ought to decide the selection of the text; (2) In the matter of selection the preacher should be conscientious; (3) As a rule the text naturally suggests the theme; (4) The text should clearly express the theme; (5) The text may be so chosen as to be a fresh presentation of the theme.

COUNSELS.

1. Find less known texts for the enforcement of familiar truths.
2. Keep a notebook for texts.
3. Occasionally revise lists of texts preached from.
4. Frequently use the words of the text while preaching.
5. Suggestions as to announcing a text.

III

THE TEXT (CONTINUED)

We are now prepared to consider the special thought in the text, with which the preacher proposes to deal in his sermon. This is what we understand by the "subject-matter." It is plain that the subject-matter of the preacher's text is related to the book from which his text is taken, and to the theme of which he treats. Before speaking of these two points it may be well that we glance at the relation of the text to the context.

The Subject-Matter

1. As to this we remark that the limit of his sermon and of his subject will generally preclude the preacher from discussing at any length the verses on either side of his text. When he is preaching from a detached portion of Scripture—a proverb for example—to do this is evidently unnecessary; but even in the case of a context such as he finds in an argumentative text—the kind of texts which abound in the Epistles of Paul for instance—it will not be possible for him to do more than glance at it. The tourist who has himself photographed at Niagara with the falls as a background must see to it that the grandeur of the background does not make his own figure insig-

nificant. Let the text stand out prominently; let it be superior, for this occasion certainly, to its context, however grand and impressive that may be.

2. Yet the text must be so used as to do no violence to the context. The familiar verse, "Be sure your sin will find you out," if it be restored to its connection will be seen to deal not with what men do but only with what they fail to do. If Gad and Reuben, content in their own rich pasturages, should refuse to help the other tribes of Israel, then let them rest assured that their sin of omission would surely be punished.[1] An intelligent study of the context, to say nothing of a preliminary study of English grammar, would have saved the Baptist preacher from perverting Paul's words, "I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you,"[2] by slicing a bit out of the verse and using it as if it were mandatory, "Keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you." A pastor who lives long enough with one church to preach his twentieth anniversary sermon to them is so worthy of our honor that we may pardon him for taking a text from Jacob's complaint to Laban, "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house"; but even he would scarcely dare restore these words to their true setting, "I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages

[1] Num. 32 : 23. [2] 1 Cor. 11 : 2.

ten times."[1] Not oftener than once in twenty years, and then only under such exceptional circumstances, should Scripture be so wrested.

I. We come now to the subject-matter of the text in its relation to the claims of Scripture.

1. As to this we remark, first, that the text must be reverently treated.

(1) There is no excuse for the deliberate and intentional misuse of a text. "Dear George," wrote quaint John Berridge when he heard of the death of Mrs. Whitefield, "has now got his liberty again," but the fact that the great field preacher was not happy in his domestic life does not excuse his taking as a text for his wife's funeral sermon the words: "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."[2] Not even his ingenuity condones the offense of the preacher who drew from the word "certain," in the verse "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves,"[3] the four points that he was sober, punctual, industrious, and married. It is hard to acquit the minister of frivolity who preached to the police from the injunction of Paul to Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man."[4]

(2) Unworthy motives have sometimes influenced the preacher in the choice of his text. A fierce partisan, taking sides with the enemies of the king, celebrated the coronation of George IV. of England by preaching from the text—which we

[1] Gen. 31 : 41. [2] Rom. 8 : 20. [3] Luke 10 : 30. [4] 1 Tim. 5 : 22.

will not give in full, although he did—"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand."[1] When pleading for the preservation of the Irish Episcopal Church as part of the State Establishment, Bishop Magee delivered a most eloquent sermon on "The Breaking Net,"[2] in which he pictured the Irish clergy as beckoning to their partners in England to come and help them; but he carefully shut his eyes to the incongruity that the stagnant waters of the Irish Church Establishment contrasted unfavorably with the great multitude of fishes which caused the nets of Peter and his companions to break, in the miracle on the sea of Galilee.

(3) We should be very careful as to the use of accommodated texts. A text is accommodated when it is so applied that the subject-matter of the sermon differs radically from the subject-matter of the verse when that verse is properly treated. There is only surface and incidental resemblance between the text as it is used by the sacred writer and as it is used by the preacher.[3] We do not say that such texts are never permissible. The burning of the Royal Exchange, London, suggested to Henry Melvill the mourning of the merchants made rich by her over the fall of Babylon, when "in one hour so great riches is come to nought";[4] and the same preacher found a text for his dis-

[1] Dan. 5 : 1, 2. [2] Luke 5 : 7.
[3] Phelps' "Theory of Preaching," p. 114. [4] Rev. 18 : 15–17.

course on the destructive fire in the Tower of London, in Peter's warning, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."[1] The long-suffering chaplain who ministered to the students at Cambridge University, England, did no violence to the thought of the original passage when by the text, "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God,"[2] he entered his protest against the prevalent vice of foot-scraping; and a proposal to disturb the body of Shakespeare was fairly enough reproved by the preacher who chose for a text the words, "Let no man move his bones."[3] These are examples of accommodated texts in which while, on the one hand, no direct reference is made to the circumstances which first inspired them, yet, on the other hand, there is no affront passed upon them. Was not the preacher before the Eton schoolboys happy in his selection when he announced for his text on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's succession, the one word "Shout," and still more so another preacher to boys when he addressed the quaintly clad bluecoat boys at Christ's Hospital School, London, from the "little coat which Hannah made for Samuel"?[4] And how much pertinence must have been added to Horace Bushnell's sermon at the time when the doctrine of repudiation was unhappily popular, by his selec-

[1] 2 Peter 3 : 11. [2] Eccl. 5 : 1. [3] 2 Kings 23 : 18.
[4] 1 Sam. 2 : 19.

tion of the word, "Alas, master, for it is borrowed!" as the motive for his indignant plea for national honesty.[1]

These, however, are exceptions. It is better as a rule to refrain from the use of accommodated texts. They dishonor Scripture, and encourage the general belief, which preachers in all the centuries of Christian history have done too much to confirm, that we can treat the Bible as we treat no other book. The mediæval preachers were notorious offenders in this matter, but they are not alone. When Pitt, the youngest of British prime ministers, came to Oxford with several church appointments in his gift, and found there far more applicants than there were offices, a sermon was preached before him from the text, "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?"[2] To preach to journalists on the words, "They could not come nigh unto him for the press,"[3] is of course unpardonable punning; but scarcely less objectionable was the text chosen on a similar occasion by a dignitary in an English cathedral, "And he charged them that they should tell no man, but the more he charged them so much the more a great deal they published it."[4] The preacher who in the words, "The voice of the turtle is heard in the land,"[5] found the doctrine of immersion, probably erred by reason of his igno-

[1] 2 Kings 6 : 5. [2] John 6 : 9. [3] Mark 2 : 4. [4] Mark 7 : 36.
[5] Song of Songs 2 : 12.

rance, which led to his getting hold of the wrong turtle; but no excuse can be urged for him who exhorted a newly married couple from the words of the psalmist, "And abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."[1]

2. Such perversions of Scripture suggest that the text must be intelligently, as well as reverently treated. Never fail to consult the Revised version, and between it and the older version choose the one which seems to come nearest to the original. Had the preacher to whom reference has already been made done this[2] he would have discovered that the text from which he drew an imperative command to keep the ordinances read, "I praise you that ye . . . hold fast the traditions even as I delivered them to you."[3] The Revised version has no doubt taken away some favorite texts from the preacher's storehouse, but if those texts ought never have been there we have no cause for complaint.

(1) Beware of spurious texts, such as may have crept into early manuscripts of the Bible, but really form no part of the original word. "Waiting for the moving of the water";[4] "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest";[5] "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"[6] are now found to be spurious. Either avoid using them altogether, or preface your announcement of the text with an explanation.

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[1] Ps. 72 : 7. [2] Page 36. [3] 1 Cor. 11 : 2. [4] John 5 : 3. [5] Acts 8 : 37. [6] Acts 9 : 6.

(2) It might be hoped that the days of our ignorance as to the meaning of texts were passed, but ignorance dies hard, and especially with the preacher who prefers darkness to light, and does not study. A fervent evangelist in the early years of this century preaching from the words, "Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,"[1] being himself able neither to read nor write, announced that he would "first consider who are right blessed, and secondly who are wrong blessed"; and one of the same simple class had a sermon on Peter's exhortation at Pentecost, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation,"[2] in which with a fine disregard both of pronunciation and exegesis he sounded the word as though it were spelt "untowered," and explained that the ancient cities had walls and towers, that without them they were at the mercy of the enemy, and that what Peter intended was to urge on his hearers the duty of avoiding a generation which had not fled to the strong city of salvation. Andrew Fuller did well to retort on the conceited young preacher who told him he was about to preach on Christ as the "one thing needful."[3] "Why then you are worse than the Socinians. They do allow him to be a man; but you are going to reduce him to a mere thing."

(3) To this warning against an ignorant use of Scripture, we add, therefore, Do not spiritualize texts which really have no spiritual significance. This was the weakness of Origen and his school,

[1] Rev. 14 : 13. [2] Acts 2 : 40. [3] Luke 10 : 42.

and since his time it has not ceased to enervate the pulpit. "The fowls of the air which neither reap nor gather into barns," said Hilary, "are the devils, and the lilies of the field which spin not are the angels." William Huntingdon, the hyper-Calvinist, expounding Isa. 11 : 8, "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den," found in this passage his favorite doctrine. "The sucking child," said he, "is the babe in grace, the asp is the Arminian, and the hole of the asp is the Arminian's mouth." This conclusive method of silencing his opponents may have sufficed for Huntingdon's congregation, but it would suffice nowhere now. The father of Robert Hall, an excellent man and often a careful expositor, saw depths of spiritual meaning in the fact that the candlestick for the tabernacle was made of pure gold;[1] and a popular preacher of our own day read the whole scheme of redemption into the direction that the same precious metal should be used in making the snuffers.[2] This delusive spirit of exposition goeth not forth save by prayer and fasting. Let the preacher abstain from his own fancies and give himself instead to a devout study of the text. Thus will he learn what is the mind of the Spirit.

(4) As one more caution let us say, Do not use as inspired texts the uninspired utterances to be found in Scripture. The record itself may be in-

[1] Exod. 37 : 17. [2] *Ibid.*, 23.

spired when what is recorded is not. A Universalist preacher founded an argument against future punishment on the words of the tempter to Eve, "Thou shalt not surely die";[1] and a famous lawyer in Boston once affirmed in court that we have "the highest authority for saying, 'Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life,'"[2] a blunder which justified the papers of the following morning in their comment, "Now we know who it is that the honorable gentleman regards as his highest authority."

Passages such as these—and there are many of them in the Bible—may of course be employed in the pulpit, but not as though they carried with them any divine sanction.

II. Consider next the subject-matter of the text in its relation to the theme of the discourse.

1. Whenever possible let the subject-matter of the text which the preacher proposes to use form a complete theme. Do not take half a text when it contains only half a truth. The apostle's injunction, "Work out your own salvation," cannot be separated from the words by which he explained it, "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and do of his good pleasure."[3]

2. Further, the text must be suitable to the theme.

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[1] Gen. 3 : 4.

[2] Job 2 : 4. See also 2 Kings 18 : 28–35; Job 1 : 9; Acts 5 : 35–39.

[3] Phil. 2 : 12, 13. See also Rev. 3 : 19.

(1) The character of the subject ought to decide the selection of the text. A doctrinal theme is made more impressive by a text taken from a doctrinal book. The book of Proverbs may be used to furnish a text for a sermon on the atonement, but it is better to choose one from the Epistles. An evangelist closing a series of meetings with a sermon from the solemn words, "It is finished," laid himself open to the charge of irreverence. To find a text for a sermon on the newspaper may be no easy matter, but that does not justify the preacher who selected, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." [1] Professor Jowett when discoursing, as he often did, on "Conversation" from "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth," was wont to justify himself by telling his hearers that the concluding words ("of God") were "an unnecessary addition of some of the manuscripts."

(2) In this matter of the selection of a text the preacher should do his utmost to be conscientious. Let him lay down the rule that he has no right to take a text unless he means to use it. So obviously should his text contain his theme, that in explaining and enforcing his subject the very words with which he prefaces his discourse should occur to the minds of his hearers. Cowper might still find cause to complain of the unscrupulous abuse of texts in this matter of selection:

[1] Isa. 52 : 7.

> How oft when Paul has served us with a text,
> Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preached.

(3) As a rule the text naturally suggests the theme which is fairly to be found in it, and in any case the text should not need to be flung on the rack and tortured before the theme can be extorted from it. Perhaps the preacher who chose for his text when preaching on "skeptical questioning in religion" a fragment from Paul, "But some man will say, 'How——?'"[1] did no injustice to the apostle's argument; but as much cannot be urged in defense of the Massachusetts minister who attacked his rebellious choir with the text, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,"[2] or the Scottish divine who invited the cyclists to listen to his eulogy of the wheel which he based on the words, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."[3] This was plainly a case in which wisdom was not justified of her children. It was a caustic critic of the same nationality who curtly disposed of a sermon preached in his hearing by a young minister from the text, "The angel did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on,"[4] by saying, "The sermon was not unlike the text; the lad did wondrously, and the text looked on." "The man," the same critic observed on another occasion, "might have said to his text at the beginning what he said to the folks at the end, 'We'll maybe meet again and maybe no.'"

[1] 1 Cor. 15 : 35. [2] Acts 9 : 5. [3] Prov. 3 : 17. [4] Judg. 13 : 19.

(4) Moreover the text should clearly express the theme. Avoid using a text which needs an extended introduction in order to make it suggest the theme on which you mean to preach. Robert Robinson preaching from the words, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life," [1] and interpreting it after his own original fashion to mean that in a time of famine the merchants in skins would sacrifice all the product of their hunting for wheat which alone could save them from starvation, was naturally obliged to begin his discourse with a long explanation before he was ready to say, "The proverb then means that we should save our lives at any price. Let us apply it to ourselves."

It seems evident that when intelligently and conscientiously chosen, the text must powerfully influence the treatment of the theme.[2] This you are wise to remember in selecting your text. Indeed, are there not texts which may be said to endanger the sermon? Either they are hard to preach from, because they raise expectations which the preacher is unable to satisfy; or else, by themselves epitomizing emotions, they express in one brief sentence what the preacher struggles in vain to amplify. A text so sublime as "Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," [3] may leave the eloquence of the rhetorician panting far behind; and Dr. Lyman Beecher tells us that the words which de-

[1] Job 2 : 4. [2] Phelps' "Theory," etc., pp. 110, 111.
[3] Exod. 15 : 11.

scribe the tears the penitent woman shed upon the feet of Jesus[1] were so much more forcible than anything which he could say about them that only by simply telling the story was he able to treat them at all. Then the verse "melted the whole congregation and me too."

(5) It will be well if the text is so chosen as to be in itself a fresh presentation of the theme. "A novel text is a new voice." A great national loss was fitly commemorated by a sermon from the words of Jonathan to David, "Thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty."[2] Spurgeon used as a text for "The Return of the Backslider" the unusual motto, "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again";[3] and Dr. Joseph Parker coming once more to his pulpit after a vacation found a text for his experience in the brief sentence, "I am returned . . . with mercies."[4]

With five counsels we may conclude what has to be said on this subject.

1. Try and find less known and less used texts for the enforcement of familiar truths. The principle of the final command may be impressively preached from the words, "That which is wanting cannot be numbered";[5] and the doctrine of future punishment must be involved in the startling declaration of Jesus, "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."[6]

2. Keep a notebook in which to write down

[1] Luke 7 : 38. [2] 1 Sam. 20 : 18. [3] Judg. 16 : 22.
[4] Zech. 1 : 16. [5] Eccl. 1 : 15. [6] Mark 14 : 21.

texts as they occur to you. In this way, as Dr. Ker puts it, you will be "prepared against the time of famine and dearth, and against the day of battle and war, when you are engaged with other things." Preserve in a few words, the circumstances connected with your finding the text—the book, incident, or illustration suggesting it.

3. Now and then revise your list of texts from which you have preached. Dr. John Duncan thinks that the reason why the religion of Matthew Henry was so exceeding broad was that "he cast himself with equal reverence on the whole of the Bible, and had no favorite texts." Every preacher is apt to err by neglecting doctrines that need to be preached, characters that ought to be studied, and often whole books in the Bible that deserve to be expounded. Our preaching is often one-sided; sometimes, one fears, it is not even so much as that. "Doctrine, precept, history, type, psalm, proverb, experience, warning, promise, invitation, threatening or rebuke—we should include the whole of inspired truth within the circle of our teachings." [1]

4. During the delivery of the sermon frequently use the words of the text. Henry Melvill, the golden-mouthed preacher, was wont to work up his sentences to an argumentative climax, and then bring out his text so as to show that he had it on his side. We counsel that in clinching an argument, in rounding a period, in capping a climax, and above all in closing the sermon, weight and

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

authority will be given by the use of the very words of your text.

5. As to announcing the text, we advise that you preface the words by as brief a form as possible. Do not hold your hearers in needless suspense. Yet at the same time by a quiet deliberateness of tone and manner you may give the impression that what you have to say is of great moment. Avoid abruptness and haste. Always tell your congregation where the text is to be found first; announce it in logical order—book, chapter, verse; and encourage the general use of the Bible in the pews. Be careful as to the emphasis, try to read the text so that it may be in itself a sermon. Emphasis is exposition. Who knows but that it may be all of the sermon some hearer will retain in his memory? Read the text, therefore, so as to stimulate interest and even to rouse curiosity. As a rule read it once only. The congregation soon knows how far the preacher will encourage listlessness. Let the whole sermon, from the text to the conclusion, be like fine music, to which an audience listens in the complete possession of all its powers of attention.

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT

SUMMARY

PRELIMINARY NOTES.

How sermons may be divided. Three classes.
1. Topical. 2. Textual. 3. Expository.
Which method to adopt in any one instance must be decided by (1) The text itself; (2) The theme; (3) The occasion; (4) The preacher's mental constitution.

THE TOPICAL SERMON.

I. DEFINITION.
1. The origin of topical sermons.
2. The distinction between the topical and the textual sermon.

II. ADVANTAGES OF THE TOPICAL METHOD.
1. Rhetorical perfection.
2. Allows of a thorough examination of the theme.
3. Trains the mind to breadth of view.

III. DEFECTS OF THE TOPICAL METHOD.
1. Tends to a neglect of the word of God.
2. Has not been so useful as textual preaching.
3. Is in danger of becoming monotonous.

IV. HOW TO TREAT A SERMON TOPICALLY.
1. Its style rhetorical.
2. Its arrangement decided by the subject with which it deals. (1) Progressive when the theme is argumentative or historical; (2) Exhaustive if one distinct thought is to be elaborated.

IV

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT

We proceed now to inquire how a text may best be treated. The answer to this will furnish us with a convenient classification for our sermons. If the text has been chosen honestly, and not at the bidding of caprice or in neglect of that reverence with which we should handle the word of God, it will naturally suggest the theme of our discourse. Sermons, therefore, may conveniently be classified according to the precise way in which the text is treated, and the precise subject which the preacher proposes to discuss. Such an arrangement places the sermon under one of three classes. These are: the topical sermon, in which the theme is especially prominent; the textual sermon, in which more regard is paid to the words of the text; and the expository sermon, in which, as a rule, a longer portion of the Bible is taken as the basis for the discourse.

The Topical Sermon

Before we proceed to consider these three classes more in detail, we may remark that which method of treatment is adopted by the preacher in the case of any special text will probably be decided by the text itself, by the theme of the sermon, by

its occasion, and by the preacher's mental constitution.

1. Some texts can only be treated topically, while others naturally cleave asunder at the touch of verbal analysis, and others again admit almost as well one method of treatment as another. A proverb furnishes a topic rather than a text; such a verse as, "Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ,"[1] may best be analyzed word for word; while the solemn unanswered question, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"[2] is equally adapted to either the textual or topical treatment.

2. The theme of the discourse must also be considered. A grand and exalted theme demands corresponding handling. "Men that usually talk of a noun and a verb" must abandon either their text or their method here. Such a sentence as, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty,"[3] had better be considered topically. But the one thing to guard against is uniformity of treatment. Variety is the spice of sermons as well as of life.

3. It is evident also that the occasion on which the sermon is preached may have much to do with the way in which the text is used. While careful verbal analysis may best serve our purpose in the ordinary course of our ministry, there will come special times when a topical treatment is to be pre-

[1] Titus 2 : 13, R. V. [2] Heb. 2 : 3. [3] Rev. 15 : 3.

ferred. The missionary sermon, the sermon at an ordination, and the sermon for great national observances, such as Thanksgiving Day, are likely to be of this order.[1]

Nor need the preacher be altogether indifferent to his own mental constitution. Personal preference is by no means a prime consideration, but neither is it to be entirely set aside. It is likely that the mind which is naturally analytical will be most at home in the textual method, and it is certain that the rhetorician will almost instinctively prefer the broader generalizations of the topical treatment.

Let us now consider the topical sermon.

I. A topical sermon we define as one which is founded on the theme or topic of the text rather than on the words of the text.

1. Here let us make two observations. The first concerns the origin of topical preaching. As we have already seen, the apostles often preached without texts, in this differing from their immediate successors, who having no sense of direct personal inspiration found in the words of the Scriptures their chief source of authority. Gradually, however, the text became corrupt, and so its power as a court of final appeal diminished. The mischievous fashion for allegorizing made it seem unnatural, and, in consequence of being often torn from its context and misapplied, it forfeited that sense of reality which should have been one main

[1] See R. W. Dale's "Sermons on Special Occasions."

source of its strength. So the use of a text fell into not undeserved contempt. Often Chrysostom and Augustine and others of the Fathers, took no text. In course of time the best preaching came to be either expository or topical, and in either case it was independent of a single text. Here, then, is one valuable purpose served by the topical method of preaching. It is a wholesome protest against mere verbal quibbling, and against the unscholarly and often superstitious use of words.

2. Our second observation deals with the distinction between the topical and the textual sermon. Both have this much in common, that they are founded on some truth of Scripture. But they differ in that the topical sermon formulates the truth in the words of the preacher, the textual rather in the words of the Bible. The question whether or not the choice of the theme precedes the choice of the text, is probably answered here. As a rule, in the topical sermon, the theme is first selected and then search is made for a text to fit to it, as the trunk is packed before the direction is written; while in the textual sermon the theme is evolved from a careful analysis of the text, although the preacher has already a tolerably clear idea of what his theme will be.

II. What are the advantages of the topical method of discussing a theme?

1. The first advantage is rhetorical perfection. Thus treated the sermon approaches nearest to a complete rhetorical effort. If the aim of preach-

ing be to make the sermon a work of art, then let the theme be discussed on the topical basis. In the history of preaching the enthusiasm of the rhetorician has often conquered the conscience of the messenger, and what are called "great sermons" are the fruit of that perilous victory. South and Bourdaloue, Robert Hall and Thomas Chalmers preached topically because they were men in whose nature the orator was predominant.

2. It must be evident also that this method allows a thorough examination of any one theme. A single text rarely does this if it be too closely adhered to. Jonathan Edwards excelled in the discussion of a doctrine in all its various aspects; but his traditional reverence for having a text prevented him from dispensing with it altogether. There were many occasions when in order to bring it over to his side he used its words in defiance of the simplest principles of exegesis. We may avoid this error, and yet find a text to suit our purpose, from which, without going into any analysis of its words,—although to them we are careful to do no violence,—we may discuss some great doctrine of our faith or some great crisis in our history.

3. As a further advantage of topical preaching, we notice that it trains the mind to breadth of view. Mere verbal preaching dishonors religion fully as much as does the substitution of human opinions for divine declarations. Preaching ought to open up generous and far-reaching prospects, to fill the mind with great conceptions of truth, and

to excite and animate the spiritual nature. Not the bare words, but the spirit of the words is what we should aim to bring into the light. The mind is stimulated at once when Robert Hall proposes to discuss "Modern Infidelity, Considered with Respect to its Influence on Society,"[1] or when Canon Liddon invites us to study "The Idea of Religion."[2] Chalmers and Mozley and Phillips Brooks are preachers who excel in this art of rousing and engaging the intellect by the announcement of a theme worthy of its concentrated attention.

III. It must be granted, however, that the defects of the topical treatment in a sermon are serious. Of all methods it seems open to the gravest objections. Some of these we proceed to mention.

1. In the first place, the topical treatment of a text leads to a neglect of the word of God. The text is chosen as a motto, and after having been once announced it is often forgotten altogether, or if not this, it is not continuously referred to, and has no vital connection with the sermon. At best it is the tribute which the preacher pays to custom, and is regarded with no more affection than is any other tax. The sermon follows the text as Peter followed his Master—afar off. Almost better would it be if, like the other disciples, it had at once forsaken it and fled. Attention is from the outset diverted from the Scriptures to the preacher. It

[1] Eph. 2 : 12. [2] Ps. 143 : 8.

is for his opinions that we listen, when we ought to hear only what God the Lord will speak. Topical preaching by neglecting the Bible in the pulpit has led to its neglect in the pews. Why should the hearer open a book to which he is never once referred? To topical preaching is also due that style of sermon which is no sermon, not a "word," or message, or familiar discourse; but instead of these a treatise, or essay. "Metaphysical not scriptural," said Dr. J. A. Alexander, after listening to a sermon of this sort; "clear, logical, acute, ingenious, heartless, orthodox . . . thankful I do not sit under the best of such preaching; I should starve."[1] From the well-known words of Jesus about true freedom,[2] Dr. Channing proposes "to maintain that the highest interest of communities as well as individuals is a spiritual interest; that outward and earthly goods are of little worth but as bearing on the mind, and tending to its liberation, strength, and glory." This grand theme leads to a discussion entirely worthy of it; but was either the theme or the discussion in the thought of Jesus when he uttered his memorable words?

2. Judged by its fruits topical preaching has not been so useful as that which has confined itself rather to an exposition of the words of Scripture. It has fostered a false conception of the purpose of preaching, and by diverting attention from the message to the messenger has too often dishonored the Spirit, and shorn the sermon of its

[1] "Life," Vol. I., p. 460. [2] John 8 : 31–36.

strength. Revivals of religion have been marked by an increased reverence for the precise words of God, while the great masters of topical preaching have sometimes mourned that their sermons so rarely led to conversions. The reason for this is obvious. The preacher has been tempted to preach about the text rather than to open up its very message; he has given his own views instead of seeking to know the mind of the Spirit; he has been interested in his theme more than in his hearers—forgetting that the sermon was made for man, not man for the sermon—and as a consequence of covering too much ground he has failed to come down to particularize his congregation, and to make close personal application to the individual conscience and heart.

3. Nor can it be denied that topical preaching has done much to hamper the freedom of the sermon, and to rob it of variety and freshness. The number of topics is after all limited, and he who has preached upon any one topic will not wish to return to it for some time. He may have what Chalmers called his "long-hand sermons," sermons, that is, in which he discusses some doctrine or duty in elaborate detail, but the intervals between such sermons are often a dead level of pulpit commonplace, trying the patience of his hearers and tolerated only for the sake of the occasional mountain peak which rises from the monotonous plain. Chalmers, to whom reference has just been made, preached in every large town of Great Britain; but

yet his sermons were surprisingly few. He was a master of that rare art which can throw into a discourse, even when preached for the fortieth time, a passion born at the moment of its first delivery. But such men, like the elaborate discourses of the ordinary topical preacher, are few and far between.

IV. A few words may be added as to the best way in which to treat the topical sermon.

1. The style will naturally be rhetorical. Formed on the model of the oration this kind of sermon will often rise to successive climaxes, and close with a well-defined peroration. At the same time, however, attention must be paid to the element of argument, which should be found in every sermon, and especially in this. Logic should never be sacrificed to rhetoric. The preacher in his theme sets out with a proposition, and he is bound to see to it that this proposition is proved, at all events to his own satisfaction. Nor should any bewitchment of oratory deprive the sermon of plain direct application. Without this the preacher does little more than fire blank cartridges; he invites us to a field day rather than challenges us to a conflict.

2. The arrangement of the topical sermon will naturally be decided by the subject with which it deals.

(1) If the preacher is handling a theme which is argumentative or historical, his treatment should be progressive. Let point after point be indicated, reached, and reviewed. Thus it was that Bishop

Butler in his "Fifteen Sermons" discussed Human Nature;[1] and thus also Henry Melvill advanced from one stage to another in the argument demanded by his subject, after he had whetted his hearers' appetites by a clear preliminary statement. The plan of campaign was first announced, and then faithfully pursued to the culmination in victory.

(2) If, on the other hand, the preacher confines himself to the elaboration of one distinct thought, his method will be to state and restate that thought exhaustively. Every separate facet of the gem will be held up to the light. Here lay the excellence of Chalmers' great sermons. "The expulsive power of a new affection,"[2] for instance, was considered in every conceivable way. It provoked Robert Hall's caustic criticism that as with the door on its hinges there was here only movement without progress; but to this it might be sufficient answer to say that neither the door nor the sermon was intended to advance. The city was faithfully compassed and in due time before the continuous circuit the walls fell down. The rams' horns had not been blown in vain.[3]

[1] See also "Sermons," by Dr. E. G. Robinson, 1896.

[2] 1 John 2 : 15.

[3] See also the sermons of Archer Butler, J. H. Newman, and Phillips Brooks.

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT—
CONTINUED

SUMMARY

THE TEXTUAL SERMON.

DEFINITION.

I. THE TEXTUAL SERMON PROPER.

1. Definition.
2. Upon what its success depends: (1) Upon skill in selection; (2) Upon a knowledge of the laws of analysis.
3. Characteristics distinguishing this kind of sermon: (1) Natural and easy; (2) With a distinct advance in thought.

II. THE TEXTUAL-TOPICAL SERMON.

1. A distinct advance on the textual method proper.
2. The divisions expressed topically but treated textually.
3. Advance and culmination in the thought demanded.

III. THE TEXTUAL-INFERENTIAL SERMON.

1. This method described.
2. Four remarks: (1) The form of this kind of sermon depends on the clearness and cogency of its logical advance; (2) Specially suitable to preachers of a logical cast of mind. (3) This kind of sermon not common. Why? (4) Very effective under favorable conditions.

CONCLUSION: Why textual preaching is to be commended.

V

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT (CONTINUED)

The Textual Sermon

In the textual sermon the text itself gives the theme, and the divisions of the sermon are naturally suggested by its prominent words. The text is not a mere motto for the sermon, but much more and much better. It is the germ of the sermon, and from it come the life and substance of the divisions. The flavor of the text is everywhere to be detected in the sermon, as the breath of the pine forest is in every fir cone taken from it.

Textual sermons we divide into the textual sermon proper, the textual-topical sermon, and the textual-inferential sermon.

I. The textual sermon in its simplest form may be defined as following closely the words of the text, clause by clause.

1. It does not exhaust their meaning, but confines itself to their bearing on the special theme of the sermon. For example, the character and purpose of affliction may be the subject of a discourse from the words, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory,"[1] and

[1] 2 Cor. 4 : 17, R. V.

then the words of the first clause of the text will suggest that this affliction is personal to ourselves, that it is not heavy, and that it is transient; while in the second clause we shall find that the purpose of the application is to work out for us glory in such measure as shall exceed all our tribulations; and this is set forth by the two clauses, "more and more exceedingly" and "an eternal weight."

2. Upon what, we may ask, does a successful treatment in the case of a textual sermon proper depend?

(1) We answer, on skill, first of all, in selecting, and then in analysis. There are, indeed, many passages of the Bible which admit of being treated in this way without any suspicion of triviality on the part of the preacher, but he must always be on his guard against the almost unconscious growth of mere verbalism. "All language," as Emerson says, "is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries are, for conveyance; not as farms and houses are, for homesteads."

(2) In order to divide a text on the lines of its precise language, and to do so intelligently, it is necessary, further, that the preacher should so far understand the laws of analysis that he can take a text to pieces, not as a child breaks up a watch, with a club, but as the watchmaker does, with deft and well-trained fingers. To each word its own weight and import must be given, nor must it ever be so detached from its context as to be indifferent

to the quarry from which it has been hewn. When well done this simple plan of a sermon is often very happy. A modern preacher deduces from the words, "Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing," [1] these three points as to God's way of providing for his creatures: He provides personally ("thou"), and easily ("openest thine hand"), and abundantly ("and satisfiest," etc.). Here is a treatment which does full justice to the psalmist's thought and yet keeps close to the psalmist's words.

3. We notice two characteristics by which this kind of a sermon should be distinguished.

(1) It should be natural and easy. In your divisions, preserve, whenever it is possible to do so, the very words of the text. In treating Heb. 4 : 7 : "Again he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To-day, after so long a time; as it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," W. C. Burns, afterward a missionary to China, but at that time an evangelist of the Free Church of Scotland, discussed, first, the meaning of hearing God's voice, then of hardening the heart, and finally found in his text three arguments against this sin: namely, losing the promised rest, the danger of neglecting any longer, and the solemn responsibility coming from being called "to-day."

To divide the words in Acts 11 : 23 by considering, first, what Barnabas saw—"the grace of

[1] Ps. 145 : 16.

God"; second, what he felt—"he was glad"; and third, what he said—"cleave unto the Lord," is to be as faithful to the text as Barnabas exhorted the believers at Antioch to be to their Master. A partition so simple as this suggests a passing caution against the trick of mere verbal division. It is often fatally easy to divide a text by its words. The Puritan preacher illustrated this when, expatiating on a passage in Solomon's Song: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight,"[1] he considered the joy of the saint when communing with his Lord under these three heads: First, what he did—"he sat"; second, where he sat—"under his shadow"; third, how he sat—"with great delight."

(2) The textual sermon proper should be further characterized by a distinct advance in thought. Each fresh division ought to carry the consideration of the theme one more step toward the climax. If this is done the preacher may not be able in every instance to take the words of his text as they happen to come. So much the better. The maxim of Joubert[2] is in place here: "Let your mind always be loftier than your thoughts and your thoughts loftier than your language." As Montaigne wisely says: "It is for words to serve and wait upon the matter and not for matter to attend upon words." Of course when the order of the words gives the order of the

[1] Song of Solomon 2 : 3.

[2] See Dale, "Lectures on Preaching," p. 176.

thought the rhetorical advance will be all the stronger.

What is it to follow Christ? He himself answers when he says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."[1] Here are three points. Self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-obliteration, are the three progressive steps in the imitation of Christ. In this instance the words as Jesus spoke them furnish the precise order in which the preacher will most naturally arrange his material, because they also furnish the precise law of development in obedience to which true discipleship grows.

II. From a consideration of this simplest kind of textual preaching we pass to the textual-topical method.

1. This is a distinct advance on the textual-proper method. Its success depends on the union of the analytical and synthetical elements in the mind of the preacher. He uses analysis first that so he may discover the precise meaning and weight of the word of God. Doing this the theme will unfold itself and will come to him in happily chosen phraseology. Then a process of synthesis begins by which the subject will grow up under his hand in symmetry and force of presentation. To illustrate the distinction between this method of making a sermon and the method of simple textual analysis we may take the weighty question to which reference has already been made, "How

[1] Luke 9 : 23.

shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"[1] To prepare a sermon on the textual-proper basis all that is needed is that each prominent word shall be taken as a division for the discourse, and in this way, the emphasis laid on "escape," "we," "if," "neglect," "salvation," and "great," will bring out the meaning of the whole passage under six heads. But at the same time we clarify our thought and arrange it in a compact and more telling manner when we reduce this number to three, and find in our text, first, a mighty deliverance ("so great salvation"); second, an impending danger ("neglect"); and third, an inevitable doom ("how shall we escape?") This order also does justice to the thought of the apostle, who was not setting forth what the gospel was, but insisting on the impossibility of our being saved if it should be neglected.

2. Notice that under this method the divisions of the sermon are expressed topically, but treated textually. That is, the thought rather than the words of the text is made prominent, and the preacher is in less danger of falling into a narrow verbal treatment of his subject. Spurgeon in a sermon plan which shows more art than is usual with him, sets forth with great freshness our love to Christ as it is summed up in the words "We love him because he first loved us,"[2] and he says that our love to Christ is (1) a fact deserving open avowal—"We love him"; (2) an effect flowing

[1] Heb. 2 · 3. [2] 1 John 4 : 19.

from a cause—"We love him because," etc.; (3) a simplicity founded on a mystery—"he first loved us"; and (4) a force sustained by another force—"We love him—he loved us."

3. We may remark, further, that there should be advance and cumulation in the thought of the sermon. This the preacher will obtain by observing closely what is the mind of the Spirit in the passage under consideration. The word of God is continually moving forward in its thought toward a distinct consummation. The poet-preacher Robertson, of Irvine, in a discourse on Paul's warning to the Ephesians,[1] "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," illustrates this in a masterly plan:[2] (1) A great period—"The day of redemption"; (2) a great privilege—"Sealed"; (3) a great practical requirement—"Grieve not," etc.; (4) the great persuasion to the performance of the requirement—"Grieve not the Spirit whereby ye are sealed."

4. As a concluding remark on the textual-topical treatment of the text, we observe that more than any other it ensures freshness and variety in the sermon. The mind of the preacher is indeed held in wholesome subjection to the words of his text, and yet at the same time it ranges freely about its central thought. In proof of this statement, it is enough to say that the textual-topical method is that which is followed by F. W. Rob-

[1] Eph. 4: 30. [2] W. B. Robertson's "Memoir," p. 129.

ertson, whose sermons more than those of any other one preacher have influenced the pulpits of our generation. His early training gave him a very profound reverence for the words of the Bible, and later in his ministry his own ripe thought trained him to look in every case through the words at the truth which they expressed. Not the flowers of rhetoric, but the solid ore which lay beneath the jeweled turf, was what he sought and found. Take, for example, his sermon on Christ weeping over Jerusalem.[1] Refusing to confine himself to the pathetic picture of the Son of Man in tears, he does full justice to the tragic element in the scene by considering "Three Times in a Nation's History," (1) a day of grace ("this thy day"); (2) a day of blindness ("hid from thine eyes"); (3) a day of judgment ("thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee," etc.). How much better because truer to the circumstances of that memorable incident in the closing days of our Lord's ministry, is this simple but impressive analysis than any amount of mere sentiment such as the ordinary surface preacher would indulge in.

III. The textual-inferential sermon furnishes the third class of sermons which draw their strength directly from the text.

1. In this instance the theme is found in the words of the text and the sermon consists of a series of inferences drawn naturally from them. In the case already considered[2] of the man who

[1] Luke 19 : 41–44. [2] Heb. 2 : 3.

neglects the gospel invitation, we infer that he cannot escape condemnation from a consideration of the character, the history ("which at the first," etc.), and the magnitude of the great salvation. This example illustrates the first remark which we make, namely, that the force of this kind of sermon depends very much on the clearness and cogency of its logical advance.[1]

2. For this reason sermons of this class specially suit the preacher of a naturally argumentative cast of mind. For example, Dr. John Ker, of Glasgow, whose eloquence was especially rich in the logic which is tempered by emotion (as the logic of the pulpit always should be), preaching from the words, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,"[2] infers that Jesus will not cast out any that come to him because to do so would not be according to his promise, his office, his heart, or his wont; and also because to do so would be to desert the work he had begun to do; and he closes with the inquiry, "Where could he cast them?"

3. This kind of sermon is not common, probably for the two reasons, that only a limited number of texts can be treated thus, and only a limited number of preachers are equal to thus treating them. The text must be one from which a series of logical propositions can be drawn; and the sermon must preserve faithfully the spirit, and even where possible the very words of the text.

[1] Phelps, "Theory of Preaching," p. 308. [2] John 6 : 37.

4. But when a text of the right order of thought is treated thus by a preacher of the right order of mind this kind of sermon is very effective. At the same time analytical, synthetical, argumentative, and rhetorical, it commands respectful hearing and lifts the preacher himself into an atmosphere of intelligent popular esteem which is as honorable to himself as it is to his office. Some of the most effective expositions in Matthew Henry's "Commentary" are of this character and show that versatile preacher in his happiest moments;[1] but it is in the hands of men of a still higher intellectual power that the inferential sermon reveals the fullness of its resources. The tremendous force of Jonathan Edwards in such a sermon as "Wrath upon the wicked to the uttermost,"[2] lies in the resistless logic of a series of conclusions drawn straight from a text upon which most preachers would hesitate to preach; and the same remark holds true about the addresses of C. G. Finney, in which the passionate emotion of the preacher quenches his logical acumen no more than the ripening vines on Vesuvius quench the fires burning at its heart.

In conclusion, let us say that textual preaching is to be commended because he who conscientiously practises it is almost certain to find in it variety of subject, freshness of treatment, and richness of resource. As a rule, the closer the preacher keeps to the word and the spirit of his

[1] *E. g.*, Jer. 38 : 7–13. [2] 1 Thess. 2 : 16.

message the ampler becomes his treasury of texts and themes. It is only when in his unaided strength he gives himself to seek and search out concerning the things that are done under heaven, that he cries with the preacher in old Jerusalem,[1] "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; . . . and there is no new thing under the sun." The Bible, as Tholuck says, "if it be thoroughly studied and made the theme of public ministration will be found to be an inexhaustible mine of intellectual and spiritual truth." We may well profit by the experience of Dr. A. A. Alexander when he writes, "Learn to preach textual sermons. The mistake of my early ministry was in preaching almost solely upon topics. If you preach textual sermons you won't be apt to preach out." In textual preaching, by the witness of many of the foremost preachers of our century, lies the secret of a long and fruitful ministry.

[1] Eccl. 1 : 9.

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT—
CONTINUED

SUMMARY

I. The Various Kinds of Expository Sermons.
   1. Scripture words and phrases.
   2. Exposition of a complete passage.
   3. A course of expository sermons: (1) The entire Bible; (2) One book; (3) Sacred biography; (4) A group of subjects.

II. Arguments in Favor of Expository Preaching.
   1. The most natural way.
   2. Scripture precedent on its side.
   3. Historic usage commends it.
   4. Greatly benefits a congregation: (1) Incites to a study of Scripture; (2) Does justice to the mind of the Spirit; (3) Builds up a congregation in divine truth.
   5. Of service to the preacher himself.

III. Qualifications for Success in Expository Preaching.
   1. An intelligent faith in the inspiration of the Bible.
   2. A power of selection.
   3. A logical mind.
   4. Preaching power.
   5. Studious habits constantly maintained.

IV. Counsels.
   1. Begin the preaching of exposition with a brief course.
   2. Begin elsewhere than at the Sunday service.
   3. Carefully study models of excellence in exposition.
   4. Show results rather than processes.
   5. Attend to the rhetoric of the expository sermon.

VI

THE TREATMENT OF THE TEXT (CONTINUED)

The Expository Sermon

EVERY sermon must have in it a certain amount of exposition, as every case in law must have in it a certain amount of statement. In the topical sermon there is likely to be some exposition of the theme; and in the textual sermon it is still more likely that as the result of careful exegesis there will be some exposition of the text. But we come now to deal with the sermon which is exclusively expository in its nature. The constantly increasing number of preachers who are setting forth the truths of Scripture in this way, and the growing demand for this sort of preaching among our more intelligent hearers, make it of the first importance that we consider just what the expository sermon is, what can be said in its favor, and what qualifications are necessary in the preacher who is desirous of doing full justice to it in his ministry.

I. There are so many varieties of exposition that we will begin by a classification.

1. Simplest of all forms of exposition is the study of Scripture words and phrases.

(1) As to the method which consists in selecting some one word, and arranging in some kind of or-

der the places where it occurs in the Bible, and then amplifying each instance with exhortation or illustrating it with anecdote, it stands related to the sermon much as the kindergarten stands related to the university. There may be infantile conditions in the spiritual life where it has its use, but we doubt it. What profit can there be in stringing together "The 'Comes' of the Bible," when the only possible connection between them is the fact that a number of passages have this one word in common?

(2) When a phrase rather than a word is chosen, an advance has been made. To select some topic, doctrinal or practical, and trace its history along the lines of revelation, is interesting and profitable; but even here great care must be taken to maintain the dignity of Scripture, not to find in it what was not meant to be there, and not to yield to the dictates of fancy, of accidental alliteration, or of mere prettiness of form. Vast harm has been done by expositors who foist a non-natural sense on words and phrases, and who, like dishonest speculators salting mines to beguile their gullible victims, dig out of the Bible just what they themselves have first put into it. So Ruskin says: "I believe few sermons are more false or dangerous than those in which the teacher professes to impress his audience by showing how much there is in a verse. If he examined his own heart closely before beginning, he would often find that his real desire was to show how much he, the expounder,

could make out of a verse."[1] How easily this degenerates into solemn trifling the mediæval sermons witness, but in later times and in schools priding themselves on the enjoyment of special light the same mischievous tendency is to be traced. "My brethren," observed a monk of this discerning order, when preaching upon the servant of the high priest warming himself, "My brethren, see how the evangelist relates not merely as an historian, 'he warmed himself,' but as a philosopher, 'because he was cold.'"

2. When we proceed to the exposition of a complete passage of Scripture we pass to a much higher kind of preaching. To do this well the preacher needs some acquaintance with the original tongues of Scripture, in their genius if not in their grammar; a familiarity with the way in which words and phrases are used in the Bible; readiness in seeing antitheses, contrasts, comparisons, and parallels; and rhetorical skill as well as spiritual fervor, so that his sermon may be alive, "a thing," as Luther said, "with hands and feet." In doing this it may be best to break up the passage which you are to expound into clauses and make of each clause a division of the discourse;[2] or it may be possible to select out of the whole passage one or two verses for a text on which all the others naturally converge. Thus the one hundred and twenty-first

[1] Ruskin, "Modern Painters," Vol. V., p. 157.

[2] Candlish, "Genesis," Vol. I., p. 46. Maclaren, "A Pattern of Prayer" (Ps. 86 : 1–5).

Psalm has for its keynote the word "Keep," and the thought of God's preserving care for Israel runs through the whole. "The Lord is thy keeper" is therefore an excellent text for a sermon on this entire psalm.[1]

3. If the preacher finds himself succeeding in such an exposition, he may naturally plan out a course of expository sermons.

(1) That even the exposition of the entire Bible is not impossible, Matthew Henry's "Commentary" remains as the substantial evidence; and Dr. Joseph Parker's "People's Bible" illustrates another and less elaborate way of attaining the same end. Dean Farrar succeeded in keeping a nobleman awake against his will by a sermon, the text of which was the whole Bible; and he advocates a series on the books of the Bible which might be prefaced by another on the Bible as a whole, and on the various kinds of literature of which it is composed.[2] "The Bible as History" can be arranged according to the great epochs it covers, and "The Bible as Literature" can be treated under the heads of history, poetry, proverbial lore, and so on.

(2) The exposition of some one book of the Bible is much to be commended. The skill of the preacher will be shown in breaking up the book

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[1] "The Expositor in the Pulpit," Prof. M. R. Vincent. See also "Notes on Genesis," F. W. Robertson (Gen. 50 : 24–26). Dale's "Yale Lectures on Preaching," pp. 229–231.

[2] F. W. Farrar, in "The Homiletic Review," January, 1897.

into distinct themes, in showing how one subject stands related to others, and in fastening upon the key thought of the passage under exposition, and holding his audience to it.[1] A series of sermons on Galatians or Ephesians can readily be mapped out in this way, because the lines of cleavage are clearly defined. The character of the book to be expounded will naturally determine the character of the treatment. Sometimes the homiletical form will be adhered to, and there will be well-marked divisions in the discourse;[2] again, when some great central doctrine is expounded, the preacher will collate passages, and his address will become more of a treatise, calling for close attention on the part of his hearers and taxing his own powers as theologian and logician as well as preacher; or if he is pursuing the course of history he will become a narrator, and will tell his story with such illustrations and enforcements as the age and audience suggest.[3]

(3) The study of sacred biography is of perpetual interest and value. Let the preacher fix upon the Scripture character whom he proposes to study, and divide his life by its main epochs, and assign one sermon or lecture to each epoch. The interest in many of the great figures of the Bible

[1] O. S. Stearns, D. D., "Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament."

[2] S. Cox, D. D., "The Private Letters of St. Paul and St. John." Alex. Maclaren, D. D., "Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon."

[3] Alex. Raleigh, D. D., "The Book of Jonah."

never flags. Abraham is the emigrant for all time, Joseph the perpetual model for young men; every age sees in David chivalrous traits which it loves to trace also in its own heroes, and, alike by his strength and his weakness, Peter never fails to touch the one universal human heart.[1]

(4) We mention as another useful kind of exposition, the consecutive study of some group of Scripture subjects such as the parables or miracles of our Lord. Good models will be found in "The Pilgrim Psalms; An Exposition of the Songs of Degrees," by Dr. S. Cox; and "The Law of the Ten Words," by Dr. J. O. Dykes.

II. Let us now glance at some of the arguments in favor of Expository Preaching.

1. First among these we mention that it is the most natural way of enforcing divine truth. To interpret the Scriptures is the purpose for which the ministry was instituted.[2] "We cannot expect to deliver much of the teachings of Holy Scripture by picking out verse by verse, and holding these up at random. The process resembles too closely that of showing a house by exhibiting separate bricks." [3]

2. More than any other way of preaching, the expository method has scriptural precedent in its favor. Ezra standing upon his pulpit of wood (Neh. 8), which they had made for the purpose,

[1] W. M. Taylor, D. D, "Elijah," etc. Dr. Maclaren, "The Life of David as Reflected in his Psalms."

[2] Alexander, "Thoughts on Preaching," p. 274. [3] Spurgeon.

with his group of elders supporting him, and opening the book of the law in the sight of all the people, and reading distinctly, and giving the sense, and causing the great open-air congregation to understand the words as he read them, is "the very first original and most ancient type and pattern of our best pulpit work to this day." [1] And Jesus, with the eyes of all in the synagogue fastened on him, expounding Isaiah in the synagogue of his early home is the perpetual model for Christian preachers. These two examples point to the regular practice in the Jewish Church.

3. Historic usage has almost everything to urge in commendation of this method. The early believers brought it from the synagogues to their meetings. In the second century Justin Martyr says that the portion of Scripture read in the public service was followed by addresses upon it; Chrysostom, two hundred years later, complains of his audience because while he is expounding the Bible their eyes are turned to the man who was lighting the lamps; and his contemporary, Augustine, in his own expositions has left us one secret of his impressiveness as a preacher. Exposition continued to protest against the puerility and irreverence of the preaching which chose a text only as a motto, "a usage learned by the modern church, not from apostolic times, but from the most corrupt age of Christendom." [2]

Supreme as an expounder, Calvin was only one

[1] Dr. Alexander Whyte. [2] Rev. Edward White.

in the fearless host of Protestant reformers who used it. Luther in Germany, Colet in England, Knox in Scotland, forged their mightiest weapons in the fires of Scripture exposition; and in times later still it is enough to mention the great name of Matthew Henry who being dead yet speaketh, and to this hour by his popular "Commentary" keeps a multitude of pulpits, in some measure at all events, loyal to this highest and noblest method of preaching.

4. Think how greatly expository preaching benefits a congregation.

(1) Inciting them to a study of their Bible, it makes them dissatisfied indeed with inferior pulpit work but keen in their appreciation of the best. It has created a standard in Scotland which has influenced not only the religion of the people, but also their habits of thought, their literary judgment, their political faith, and the fullest pulsations of their patriotism.

(2) It does the amplest justice to the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures, and brings with it the approval of God, for the ministry which honors him the most is the ministry which he is surest to honor. Incidentally it should be said, that exposition allows of the impartial treatment of many portions of Scripture which would otherwise be neglected, or from which the preacher might turn aside out of a super-sensitive fear of being thought personal. "When the Scripture battery is fired off in order, there is no suspicion as to the laying

of the guns. We all take our turn to be under fire, as we all need it." [1]

(3) So it is sure when faithfully done to build up a congregation in divine truth. A minister will be likely to remain when he is bound to his people by an unfinished course of exposition, and is not tempted to throw up his church in a hurry between the irresponsible excursions among disconnected and desultory texts. How could Matthew Henry leave Chester for London at a time when his people were waiting to see him wrestle with an unfulfilled prophecy, or a perplexing doctrine? "This skipping and divagation from place to place," says John Knox, "be it in reading, be it in preaching, we judge not so profitable to edify the church as the continual following of one text." An American visitor to Scotland heard Dr. Candlish expound the eighth and ninth chapters of Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, verse by verse, by way of inducing his people to pay off a debt on the church; and he testified that "the attention of the great congregation was intense as they followed him with their open Bibles. The preacher put the appeal upon the very highest ground—the lesson of God's word on the subject of giving." [2]

5. To the preacher himself, I need scarcely add, expository preaching is of incalculable service. It gives him the relief of variety in sermon work, it

[1] Rev. Edward White.

[2] Prof. M. R. Vincent, "The Expositor in the Pulpit," p. 24.

enriches him with texts which he lays aside for his other sermons, it affords him an opportunity to deal with delicate themes, and it saves him from the anxiety to know, when one Sunday is safely surmounted, on what he is to preach when the next comes around. Here is one secret of a long and fruitful pastorate.

III. What, it may now be asked, are the qualifications for success in expository preaching?

1. We take it for granted, to begin with, that the preacher has an intelligent faith in the inspiration of the Bible. Whether or not he has formulated for himself a theory of inspiration, it is evident that by cutting himself loose from any reliance on the final authority of human opinion, and by refusing to submit his own judgment to the dictum of any historical church, he finds himself shut up to the supremacy of the word of God. It is safe to affirm that while a vast amount of textual preaching has imperceptibly weakened the respect which thoughtful people feel for the Bible, expository preaching is bound to strengthen faith in it; bound to do so, we say, because it compares spiritual things with spiritual, appeals to testimony, gets at the roots of history, wields the weapon of argument with a skill learned at the feet of teachers greater than Gamaliel, and charges home on the intelligence of its hearers with the articles of Paul's great appeal, "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say."

2. The preacher to do his work well as an ex-

pounder of Scripture, should possess a power of selection. He must know what he himself can do best; what parts of the Bible are especially needed by his congregation; and then how to deal in a workmanlike way with the portion when it has been fixed upon. He will not find all Scripture submit itself to the expository treatment. Unless there be unity of structure he will be tempted to substitute a few scattered remarks for the continuous and progressive unfolding of truth; his sermon will be a coat of many inharmonious colors, in little danger of exciting the jealousy of his brethren; and his method, if method it may be called, will be that of the blundering preacher who said that he preferred to hold forth on a long text, because when he was persecuted in one verse he could flee to another.

3. We add, therefore, that he himself must train his mind in logical processes. Analysis will help him to determine what the passage under consideration contains, and synthesis will teach him how to present it effectively and forcibly to his congregation. Expository preaching, as much as landscape painting, depends largely on a knowledge of perspective. Do not spend half an hour over a particle, hewing out for yourself some exegetical cistern that can hold no water, while forsaking the fountain of living water for which the people are athirst. The specific gravity of the Dead Sea; the probable meaning of Urim and Thummim; the birthplace of Judas Iscariot; the weak eyesight

of the Apostle Paul, are points which may be dismissed in a few words, without doing any injustice to the emphasis of divine truth. Map out your expository series carefully before beginning to preach. See the end from the beginning, and—for they also are men of like passions with yourself—let your hearers see it also. It will quicken and maintain their interest if they know that you are not starting out, as did Abram, not knowing whither you are going. That way, to the ordinary preacher, Canaan does not lie.

4. So many expository experiments have failed for the lack of distinguishing between the teacher's chair and the throne of oratory, that we must insist upon preaching power as another essential to success. Avoid, on the one hand, becoming too hortatory; but, on the other hand, be on your guard against becoming too didactic. The preacher is a prophet, and comes to us with a message. The church is not the class-room.

5. We crown our requirements when we insist that to expound the Bible satisfactorily there must be studious habits, and a resolution on the part of the preacher constantly to maintain them. Roger Bacon, in the thirteenth century, traced the decay of exposition to the ignorance of the bishops, and in all centuries and countries the preacher has found it dangerously easy to glide into exhortation when he should be rather exercising himself in explanation. Dr. Howard Crosby, who maintained for many years a high level of exposition, after

saying that for a series of Old Testament discourses, which he was then giving in New York, he carried no manuscript into the pulpit, and indeed prepared no rhetoric, added: "I study three days on each exposition, using every help of Hebrew history, geography, archæology, etc., with prayer. These exercises have made my people Bible students. One of these discourses I consider worth a dozen of my set sermons."

IV. In conclusion we offer the following counsels:

1. Begin the practice of exposition with some book or portion of Scripture which will not take too many Sundays. Ruth, the Idyll of the harvest field; the letter of Paul to Philemon, "the polite Epistle"; or the Messages to the Seven Churches in the Revelation, will not tax you or your hearers severely. Should you or they show signs of weariness, suspend the expositions, or, better still, anticipate possible languor by making the series occasional.

2. What we may perhaps call trial-trips on the great sea of exposition may with advantage be taken at other services of the church than those of the Sunday worship. A preparation class for teachers, a Bible class for young men, or a series of brief expository addresses continued over a number of weeks at the church prayer meeting will give steadiness of flight and readiness of resource.

3. Learn how to expound by a careful study of

the masters of the art. Mr. Moody can teach you how to use exposition in its simplest form, Dr. Candlish how best to open up a doctrine, Dean Stanley how to make the history of an ancient people yield lessons of perennial freshness; under Dr. W. M. Taylor you may study the best way of popularizing Scripture biography; and for the continuous exposition of a book of the Bible you may take as models, F. W. Robertson on Genesis, Dr. Maclaren on the Psalms, Dr. G. A. Smith on Isaiah, and Dr. R. W. Dale on Hebrews. A preliminary exercise of much value will be found in President Wayland's exposition of "A Day in the Life of Jesus of Nazareth."

4. Be careful to show results rather than processes. The scaffolding of your building has its place in the study, but not in the pulpit. Exegesis is not exposition, although it may be essential to it. Straw and clay are not bricks, although the pyramids could not have been reared without them. We do not find our appetite for dinner stimulated by seeing the fowls captured and slain as one does in the Spanish *posada*. Expository preaching becomes dry and sapless when we are treated to details which belong to the preparation rather than to the delivery of the sermon. The learned Dr. Duncan, of Edinburgh, began to lecture to his congregation on the Shorter Catechism, and took three lectures over the first half of the first question. He proposed to treat his subject exhaustively, but his hearers resented being in-

cluded in the same heroic method, and so with the third Sabbath the series on the Shorter Catechism died the death.

5. Accustom yourself, if you do not write your expository sermons in full, to compose sentences, especially in defining a doctrine or locating a place or sketching a character. Make ample notes and bring to the pulpit a mind clear, full, and ready. Expository preaching, as Tholuck warns us, "cannot be done purely extemporaneously." Not at once, remember, can skill in this high order of preaching be acquired. But he who sets himself to do it, "ever learning in it, ever improving in it, ever adding to his treasures of exposition and illustration, ever putting himself into his lecture, and ever keeping himself out of it, will never grow old, he will never become worked out, he will never weary his people, but he will to old age bring forth his fruit in his season, and his leaf shall not wither." [1]

[1] Dr. Alexander Whyte.

THE THEME

SUMMARY

I. Definition.

1. The theme is the subject of the discourse.
2. Must be derived from the text.
3. Modified by the purpose which the preacher has in view. (1) He should always have a purpose; (2) One theme sufficient.

II. The Advantages of Having a Theme.

1. Insures arrangement in the discourse.
2. Promotes unity: (1) The theme to be distinctly announced; (2) To be evident throughout the discourse; (3) To remain the final and ruling impression.
3. Gives compactness: (1) Themes commended which can be distinctly defined; (2) Limited themes to be preferred.

III. Sources from which Themes may be Drawn.

1. The Bible.
2. Pastoral work.
3. Our life, and special occasions in it.
4. Intercourse with other preachers.

Counsels: (1) Have a sermon notebook; (2) Gather materials from all sources; (3) Keep a list of the themes preached upon.

Note. As to the difficulty of finding theme.

IV. Characteristics by which Themes Should be Distinguished.

1. Clearness: (1) In thought; (2) In wording.
2. Propriety: (1) Avoid remote themes; (2) Maintain the true level of pulpit discourse.
3. Freshness.
4. Fullness and sufficiency: (1) Deal with important themes; (2) With the great saving truths of Christianity.

Note. Courses of sermons.

VII

THE THEME

I. From the text we pass to the theme of the sermon. This we define as the subject upon which the preacher proposes to speak, drawn from a passage of Scripture and modified by the purpose which the preacher has in view. Definition

1. The theme is the subject of the discourse. What Canon Liddon so often claimed for the truth of the gospel we must insist on in the theme. It must "know its frontiers." And in proportion as the preacher keeps himself to his office of messenger, the word of the Lord which has come to him will give both center and circumference to his subject. The fact that the sermon has a distinct and limited theme makes it a sermon indeed; that is, a distinct and limited "word." This it is that distinguishes it from the essay, which is allowed to be more discursive. The difference lies indeed in the distinction between the etymology of the words "sermon" and "essay."

2. The theme must be derived from the passage of Scripture which the preacher has chosen for his text. So dependent is the one on the other that we may say that the theme should be evident

in the text as one of its ruling ideas. The preacher who, at a children's service, takes as his theme, "Unpleasant Children," and as his text the words, "Their houses shall be full of doleful creatures,"[1] may have been as unfortunate in his family as he was in his text; he could hardly have been more so. To preach a sermon with the title, "Death the Interpreter," and the theme, "The advantage to a great cause in the death of its great leaders," from the sublime words of Jesus, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you,"[2] is to merge the special thought of the text in a commonplace generality. On the other hand, the "Unnaturalness of Irreligion" sets the theme of the inquiry, "If then I be a father where is mine honor?"[3] in a fresh light; and Paul's exhortation, "And be not fashioned according to this age,"[4] is happily struck off as "Enlisted against Environment."

2. The theme should be modified by the purpose which the preacher has in view in his sermon.

(1) To have a clearly defined purpose in your mind in every sermon which you prepare will save it from aiming at nothing and hitting it every time,[5] which is the chief end, one fears, of many sermons. "The essential ground of a new sermon is a new spirit. The preacher has a new thought, sees the sweep of a more comprehensive tendency."[6]

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[1] Isa. 13 : 21. [2] John 16 : 7. [3] Mal. 1 : 6.
[4] Rom. 12 : 2., R. V. [5] Whately. [6] Emerson.

(2) A clear purpose will also insure your having only one theme in your sermons. There may be more than one in the text, but there should not be more than one in the sermon. With characteristic frankness Professor Jowett confessed that the fault of his sermons was that they had "many crude ideas and jump from one to the other, instead of a single one well developed." That Archbishop Magee was so great a preacher was largely due to his observing the rule to have one idea only in each sermon, and to arrange every sentence with a view to that.

II. What are the advantages of having a theme? We mention three.

Advantages

1. The theme insures arrangement in the discourse. The theme is the sermon condensed; the sermon is the theme unfolded.[1] We would advise the preacher who is tempted to wander to write up the theme of his sermon which he is preparing, in some conspicuous place near his desk, and now and then to glance at it and ask, "Am I keeping close to my subject?" In doing so he may please himself by recalling the precedent of Pliny, "I look upon it as the first duty of any writer frequently to throw his eyes upon his title-page and to consider well the subject he proposed to himself."

2. As a second advantage, the theme promotes unity in the discourse.

(1) As soon as may be let the theme of the dis-

[1] Fénelon.

course be distinctly announced. Ruskin quotes with approval the opinion of men practised in public address that hearers "are never so much fatigued as by the endeavor to follow a speaker who gives them no clue to his purpose."[1] "A good sermon," to recur to Archbishop Magee, "should be like a wedge, all leading to a point." More than one point does not insure workmanlike execution in either the wedge or the sermon.

(2) We gauge the excellence of a sermon among other things by this: Is the theme evident throughout? Would a late-comer, arriving when the discourse was well under way, learn what were the text and theme before he had been listening five minutes? Statement, argument, illustration, application, do they all bear closely upon the subject? If they do, the theme will remain as the final and ruling impression on the hearer's mind.

(3) The theme when you announced it amounted to a promise made to the congregation. Have you kept it? Or is there need to apply to your discourse the Puritan criticism in early New England days, "The text was more proper to the business than the sermon."[2]

3. As a third advantage in having a theme, we say that it helps to give compactness to the discourse.

(1) We recommend themes which are capable

[1] "Sesame and Lilies," p. 6.

[2] "The Pilgrim Fathers of New England," by Dr. John Brown, p. 309.

of distinct definition and over which the sermon will knit itself closely. The great thing is, as Napoleon said, "*Savoir se borner*" (To know our limitations). For lack of remembering his own maxim, Napoleon was flung back from the icy wastes of Russia and closed his days within limits pathetically small for so great a genius. Many a preacher has also "found his Waterloo" by aiming at more than he could handle. As Wesley puts it, he grasps at the stars and sticks in the mud.

(2) So that we should say that themes which are limited are to be preferred to themes which are vast. "It is limitation," says Goethe, "which makes the poet, the artist, the man." Restriction of theme, however, is not to be mistaken for pettiness of theme. Keep among the great subjects for pulpit discourses; only be content with one aspect of a truth at a time. Restriction of theme allows you to make your sermon measurably complete, it stimulates your own inventive powers, and it quickens the interest of your hearers. The greatness of England is largely owing to its being an island, and a limited theme will sometimes—to carry the parallel one point further—give full play to your powers of acquisition. "The Goodness of God" is too vast a theme. It will beguile you into vague rhetoric and leave no clear impression; but "The goodness of God as it is exemplified in the creation and sustenance of man," is a subject which, by limiting our field, stimulates our powers of observation.

III. We may now consider the sources from which themes may be drawn.

Sources

1. The Bible is, of course, the first and most fruitful of these. All that needs to be said here is by way of warning to the preacher that neither texts nor themes are to be found by searching for them in a professional spirit. Matthew Arnold was right in thinking that to have "to look about for subjects was a horrible thing, and when it has to be done week after week a recurrent terror which might well drive one mad." But no such fate awaits the preacher who loves and lives with his Bible. While he is reading it aloud in the public service, in the Bible class, or in the homes of his people, as well as when he makes it the man of his counsel in his own hours of devotion, the Bible will furnish him with a treasury of themes.

2. A rich quarry will be found by the faithful minister in his pastoral work. Here experimental themes of great acceptance will be suggested to him. The sermons of William Jay, of Bath, are models still of the best kind of experimental preaching, and they deal in the main with just such topics. "Domestic Happiness," and the "Disappointments of Life," and the "House of Obed-Edom," are no doubt themes more homely than heroic, but in this very fact lies their excellence. Treating of "the perennial truisms of the grave and the bedchamber, of shifting fortunes, of the surprises of destiny, and the emptiness of

the answered vow," our preaching may with advantage follow very closely the lines of our daily life. With the alteration of one word only we may apply to the preacher what John Morley has said of Macaulay: "The great success of the best kind of preaching is always the noble and imaginative handling of the commonplace."

3. We enlarge our view only a little when we indicate the special occasions in our more public life as themes which claim notice in the pulpit. As one of a community, as a citizen with a stake in the country, as a man to whom nothing human is foreign, the minister is called to set the duties and privileges of this life of ours in the light of Christian training.[1] The main source of the interesting in life, as Mr. John Burroughs wisely insists, is "human association. The railroad may be at war with every feature of the landscape through which it passes, but it has a tremendous human background." While confessing his dislike to sensational preaching, Emerson grants that it is impossible "to pay no regard to the day's events, to the public opinion of the times, to the stirring shout of party, to the calamities and prosperities of our time and country."[2]

4. It is obvious that sermon themes are often suggested by intercourse with men who are themselves preachers. We shall be more likely to weave new patterns if we compare the product of our

[1] See R. W. Dale's "Sermons on Special Occasions."
[2] Emerson Lectures, "The Preacher."

several looms with those of others of like occupation with ourselves; and still more fertile to many minds will be the intercourse with books. Spurgeon could find a theme of immediate moment for the pulpit in the evening paper, and the preacher who reads widely in history, philosophy, poetry, will never want for subjects.

(1) In your sermon notebook jot down each text of Scripture, each sermon germ, each theme as it occurs to you.

(2) Gather fish of every kind; put down everything that seems to have "large and discoursible contents in it, whether Christian or heathen." [1]

(3) Keep a list of the subjects on which you have preached, and now and then go through it. By doing this you will be more likely to preach on the whole round of truth, not necessarily in any systematic way, but rather as opportunity offers. Payson once made an analysis of all the sermons which he had given to his people for six months, and embodied it in one sermon which he preached to them. "They were astonished," is his testimony; "and I was astonished at the amount of truth which had been presented to them." Dr. R. W. Dale says that he sometimes "drew up in December or January a list of some of the subjects on which he resolved to preach during the following twelve months." The retrospect of one of these preachers and the foresight of the other are commended to any young minister who is

[1] Dr. N. Burton, Yale "Lectures on Preaching," p. 48.

troubled, as Dean Stanley was when he began his work, with a fear that he should never find subjects on which to preach. Times of temporary mental impoverishment or weariness will no doubt come, but in such a case the preacher may infer that he has been working more than he has been thinking or thinking more than he has been working. A glut in the market is almost as unfavorable to sound trade as are mills which lie idle. The one indeed leads to the other. What old Dr. Bellamy, of Connecticut, said to the young minister who asked him what he should do to supply himself with matter for his sermons, may be repeated here with advantage: "Fill up the cask, fill up the cask, fill up the cask; and then if you tap it anywhere you will get a good stream. But if you put in but little, it will dribble, dribble, dribble; and you must tip, tip, tip." The preacher who is at the same time in touch with God and man, "true to the kindred points of heaven and home," has no reason to fear that the day will come which does not bring with it just the message to which it needs to listen.

IV. By what characteristics should the theme be distinguished?

Characteristics

We mention four: Clearness, Propriety, Freshness, and Fullness or Sufficiency.

1. Of these we place Clearness first. The thought of the theme should be clear. It is like the direction on a letter, about which one ought not to

need to ask twice what it means. If you are preaching on the words of Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us,"[1] your theme should not leave it in doubt whether the reference is to Christ's love to us or to our love to Christ. Only a preacher of a nebulous mind would announce as the theme of a discourse on the words "It pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell," "The All-comprehendingness of the Divine Humanity."[2] On the other hand, a theme to the full as stimulating to intelligent hearers is deduced from Matt. 10 : 40, 41, "The Principle of Moral Identification." Clear thought is especially necessary in themes dealing with the mysteries of life and faith. But, indeed, Carlyle's maxim is everywhere true that "the first and last secret of art is to get thorough intelligence of the fact to be painted, represented, or in whatever way set forth."

(2) Great care should also be taken to have the wording of the theme as clear as possible. The preacher should practise himself in forms of expression compact and yet comprehensive. What can be the mental condition of the preacher who announces as the subject of his morning sermon, "The Magnitude, Light, and Revelations of the Guiding Stars of Individuals and Nations in their Respective Firmaments"? On the other hand, as illustrations of brief but sufficient forms, we may select, "God's Glory in Concealing; Man's Honor in Discovering" (Prov. 25 : 2); "Christ's

[1] 2 Cor. 5 : 14. [2] John Pulsford, D. D., on Col. 1 : 15–20,

Gift to Us, and Ours to Him" (Titus 2 : 14); "The Tempted Sinner and the Tempted Saviour" (Heb. 2 : 18); "Jesus at a Stand" (Mark 10 : 49); "Robinson Crusoe's Text" (Ps. 50 : 15). Such themes as these are readily remembered.

2. The theme should further be distinguished by propriety. Let the preacher refrain from choosing subjects of no present interest. Better, as Daniel Webster advised, "take a text from St. Paul and preach a sermon from the newspaper."

(1) Themes which are remote, abstruse, and antiquarian should be avoided. The state of the Episcopal Church in the days of the Stuarts must have been deplorable if, as a Royal Commission reported, one preacher invited his congregation to investigate with him the exact period at which Isaac was weaned; and another to follow the train of thought which led him to the conclusion that previous to the fall the serpent walked erect on its tail.

(2) There is a certain recognized level for pulpit discourse. Do not intentionally sink below it. Remember that what might suit a Bible class may be out of place in a sermon. There are too many subjects announced in the newspapers as themes for the coming Sunday which are mere baits to catch the curious and unwary, entirely unworthy of any Christian minister. A single word of warning should be sufficient to guard the preacher against pandering to the gossip of the hour or the unwholesome taste for supping on horrors. Irreverence in themes is never pardonable. The preacher

who discoursing from the words, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven," announces as his text, "The Chirography of our Lord," can only have reached this bad pre-eminence by years of rhetorical audacity.

3. At the same time the preacher should aim at freshness in both the thought and the wording of his theme. "Originality does not consist in saying new things, but in treating old things in a new way."[1] A careful exegetical study of Scripture will be likely to contribute to this welcome element of freshness, alike in the theme and the sermon. The intense affection of the father for his son in the parable of the Prodigal expressing itself in the verb "kissed"[2] gives us a new and stronger view of the forgiving love of God for the penitent. "The fellowship of duty" is a happy theme to deduce from the words of Jesus to John the Baptist: "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."[3] "Wonder in the wrong place"[4] quickens our curiosity in a legitimate way; "The capacity of religion extirpated by disuse,"[5] is Bushnell's fresh setting of a familiar text; and in the broken sentence "We cannot but—,"[6] Dr. W. M. Taylor finds the striking theme, "The Irrepressible in Christian Testimony." In themselves such themes are almost sermons.

4. Fullness and Sufficiency should also characterize the themes for pulpit discourse.

[1] Goethe. [2] Luke 15 : 20. [3] Matt. 3 : 15. [4] Luke 8 : 25. [5] Matt. 25 : 28. [6] Acts 4 : 20.

(1) No preacher worthy of the name should be afraid of dealing with important themes. Dr. Johnson confessed that "he always went into stately shops" in the London which he knew so well. We may with advantage follow his example in the Bible which we should know even better. Colonel Ingersoll's advice to the speaker may be quoted here: "He should never clog his discourse with details. He should never dwell upon particulars, he should touch universals, because the great truths are for all time." It is obvious that the preacher who discusses great subjects, if he does it in the right spirit and with adequate preparation, will challenge the attention of his hearers. In a down-town chapel in Birmingham, England, Dr. R. W. Dale through all his long ministry held a great congregation of men and women who learned to do their best thinking as they listened to him. He was wont to warn preachers that "the flowering shrubs of Mount Carmel" would not keep their churches full. "The mysteries of sin and love, of death and judgment, were never long absent from his thoughts," and therefore they were constantly brought under the consideration of his hearers.

(2) We add that the preacher will do well to discourse frequently upon the great saving truths of the Christian religion. One of Spurgeon's last testimonies before his brethren was in favor of texts which, although they are hackneyed and commonplace, are still the texts which bring men

to Christ. "Looking through a longish ministry," he said, "he had found more converts traceable to such texts as 'This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation,' etc., and 'God so loved the world,' etc., than to others, by one hundred to one." And his own course was the most eloquent comment on this his final counsel to his brother ministers. "It was not easy to keep to these old truths; but real genius lay in making those few things in number to be infinite in their variety; in setting them forth so that there should be sufficient novelty and freshness to attract, while the convincing, vivifying, and sanctifying truth should be always the same."[1]

Perhaps this is the best place in which to counsel the preacher to prepare and deliver courses of sermons. Either morning or evening he may always with advantage have such a course running. A course of sermons should not be too long. The days are past in which even Matthew Henry would be tolerated if he preached for twenty years on the "Questions of the Bible," although filial piety might urge in extenuation that his father, Philip Henry, took forty sermons in order to do justice to the parable of the Prodigal Son. A text which at first you prepare to deal with in a single sermon will often break up into three or four. Such short courses are valuable. For example, in Jude 20, 21, the words, "building up," "praying in," "keep yourselves," "looking for,"

[1] Address, London Baptist Association, 1887.

will furnish the four progressive stages of a course on "The Divine Life in Man." The preacher will do well rather to err by being too brief than by being too long in such courses. The gift in tediousness which kindled Thomas Fuller's admiration for the German divine who, proposing to expound Isaiah, took twenty-one years over the first chapter and "yet finished it not," is no longer counted a virtue; and we have now no sympathy for the rabbi who promised to write a commentary upon part of Ezekiel, but before beginning, "requested the Jews to furnish him with three hundred tons of oil for the use of his lamp while he should be engaged in the work." There was little danger of this illustrious scholar coming under the condemnation passed on the Foolish Virgins. Everything would go out before his lamp. In these degenerate days the congregation certainly would. A continuous exposition of any one book of the Bible may last over many months, but a course which has as its *motif* one thought or theme should be much shorter.

COURSES OF SERMONS.

This list may suggest as well as enumerate subjects that can with advantage be arranged in brief courses.[1]

"The Christian Names of the Bible," "Conversions by the Way" (in the ministry of Jesus), "Crowds of the Bible," "First Things in Human

[1] See Phelps' "Theory of Preaching," p. 601.

History," "First Things in the Christian Church," "Fools of the Bible," "The Home," "The Lord's Prayer."

"Miracles by the Way" (in the ministry of Jesus), "The Paradoxes of the Gospel," "The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross," "Supreme Realities," "The Ten Commandments," "Things Said Against Jesus."

THE THEME—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERMON. Various methods. The usual way of preparing a sermon.

I. THE PREPARATION FOR THE PLAN.

1. Preliminary points: (1) Define "development of the theme"; (2) The germ found in the first idea; (3) The theme grows during the gathering and arrangement of material; (4) In what this process consists; (5) Notes to be made during the process; (6) How the theme unfolds itself; (7) Let there be no haste to make a plan.
2. Stages in the development of the theme: (1) Examine the text; (2) Read the context; (3) Compare with parallel passages; (4) Read up the literature of the text; (5) Avail yourself of illustrative aids.

II. THE PREPARATION OF THE PLAN.

1. What has already been done.
2. The plan may now be sketched out.
3. This should be done with much care.
4. Advantages of a full plan.

CONCLUSION. The plan represents conscientious work in thinking the subject through. It is of more real value than even the writing of the sermon in full.

VIII

THE THEME (CONTINUED)

When one of our foremost preachers[1] writes to a correspondent that he has really nothing to say about his way of making sermons that could profit others, he expresses a truth which the student of homiletics will do well to lay to heart. "Not every monk can walk in Luther's shoes," but the humblest may walk in his own. Every preacher must find by patient continuance and growing experience what is the best way in which he can prepare for the pulpit. Dr. Guthrie fixed on a text, and then put on paper, "just as they occurred, all thoughts, sentiments, figures, and illustrations that seemed pertinent to the subject in hand." Having provided a store of matter he arranged it under appropriate heads and proceeded to the proper work of composition. Archbishop Magee never looked about him for suggestions until he had sketched the idea of his sermon. Spurgeon, on the contrary, having fixed upon his text, read widely in the commentaries upon it. Dr. Maclaren knows no method except to think about a text until he has something to say about it, "and

The Plan and the Theme

[1] Dr. Alexander Maclaren.

then go and say it with as little thought of self as possible." Beecher was always preparing sermons, but the special subject for the next Sunday was not decided upon until Saturday; and during an hour and a half of undisturbed study on Sunday morning "the vision stood before him, and as hastily as possible he sketched the outline."

The methods pursued by other preachers, and especially by such preachers as these, are of little service to us; but it is safe to say that the following steps mark the development of most sermons. The text occurs to us in the course of our ordinary reading or during our pastoral work; oftener than not the theme is suggested simultaneously—but as a suggestion only, needing development and definition. These follow as the reward of careful study; and out of them grows the sermon plan. Not until the plan is clearly laid out should the work of composition begin; and when composed, whatever method the preacher adopts, the sermon should be ready for delivery. It will be seen from this analysis of the growth of the sermon that the plan is central; on it converge the lines of preparation, while from it proceed the lines of delivery.

We will now consider the preparation for the plan, and the preparation of the plan.

I. The preparation for the plan. This consists in a thorough development of the theme or thought in the text which we propose to use.

1. The following preliminary points should be carefully noted.

(1) By the development of the theme we mean the growth of the subject-matter of the sermon as the result of a patient and generous study of the text. "By continually thinking upon it," was what Sir Isaac Newton answered when he was asked how he discovered the true system of the universe. This is the secret which the preacher also must acquire. Nothing can take the place of earnest original thought.

(2) The germ of this development you will find in your first idea, in that which first suggested the text. Carefully note this, for if it turn out to be the thought of your text you are bound to make it the thought of your sermon also.

(3) The growth of the theme takes place during the process of gathering and arranging your materials.

(4) This process must consist in a thorough analysis of the text and the theme, and of the circumstances which lie about them—what we may call their environment.

(5) Upon a large sheet of paper make your notes, as you are gathering and classifying your materials.

(6) While thus engaged, be on the alert to detect the unfolding of the theme and its logical and orderly arrangement in a plan. Very often this development will also suggest to you the natural transitions from one division of the discourse to the next. The management of his transitions marks the practised preacher. They

are the bridges of discourse, and by them he passes from one point to another, while for lack of them the preacher finds himself trembling on the edge of some great gulf with no means to get across to his next thought. Into that gulf many a hapless sermon plunges and is lost.

(7) Do not be in any haste to make your plan. Let the material accumulate until you have enough and to spare. "I can always work," said Tennyson, "when I see my subject, though sometimes I spend three-quarters of a year without putting pen to paper." We cannot afford to wait so long as this, but we must learn to make no definite and final plan until we also see our subject.

2. We can now proceed to consider the various stages in the development of the theme.

(1) First, then, examine the text. Compare the Authorized version with the Revised, turn, if you can, to the original, and at all events with the use of a good Critical Commentary[1] analyze each word and phrase of importance; find its meaning and usage, and how it is employed in this precise passage. With more force than elegance Spurgeon used to say, "I like to lie and soak in my text."

(2) Then, secondly, read the context. It may be limited to a few verses, it may be a whole chapter, but in any case take the time necessary to get it in outline before your mind. We need not only textual but also contextual preaching. As Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, a prince of pulpit exegesis,

[1] See *e. g.*, Bengel's "Gnomon," on Luke 2 : 29.

says, "The context of a Scripture is half its interpretation. If a man would open a place of Scripture, he should do it rationally; he should go and consider the words before and the words after."

(3) As a third step, compare the text with parallel passages which will often explain, limit, illustrate, and light up your text. A trustworthy Reference Bible, a Scripture text book, and Young's Concordance, will be of service here.

(4) Then fourthly, you will do well to read up the literature of the text, as it may be found in commentaries, in theological and historical works bearing upon it, and in books of travel and research such as will give you local color. Your purpose in doing this is to get into the mind of the sacred writer and think his thoughts after him.

(5) And as a last point, we recommend the preacher to assist the development of his theme by illustrative aids. Note the pictures in the words of the text and context. Here you will find your happiest illustrations. The Interleaved Bible in which you are storing the results of your reading and observation will come into use now. Without falling back on cyclopædias of illustration—which are to the preacher's own collection what the hotel is to the home—you will have at hand a treasure-house of original matter, the only key to which you retain in your own possession.

Such are the processes by which the theme is

developed. We need only add that the order here indicated is not arbitrary. In the fervor of discovery, in what Magee calls, when dealing with this subject of the preparation of the sermon, "that most intoxicating of all pleasures, the sense of power," the preacher will often find more than one of these lines opening before him. But he will soon accustom himself to give to each its place; his sheet of paper in the course of two or three hours will be covered with notes; and looming here and there like mountain peaks in the early morning he will see the points of his discourse rising into the sunshine.

The Preparation of the Plan

1. During the process of study which we have been following the preacher has got at the meaning of his text, he has freed it from superfluous matter, formulated his theme distinctly, and prepared the way for a logical and effective sermon plan.

2. All that now remains to be done is to sketch this plan out. Too much attention can hardly be given to this. "Eloquence and manner are the hammer that sends the wedge home, but the *sine qua non* is the disposition of the parts, the shape."[1]

3. The plan should be worked over until it is so complete that if necessary it could be preached from without writing the sermon in full. The preacher may take a hint from the novelist. A successful story-teller of our own times would take

[1] Magee.

about three weeks of very close application in composing the plot, and until the whole of this was settled upon not one word of the novel was written. "Finished writing my plot," we read in George Eliot's journal, "of which I must make several other draughts before I begin to write my book." She aptly says elsewhere, "Construction once done serves as good wheels for progress." "My book is finished," writes Emile Zola, when he has accumulated something like one thousand seven hundred pages of notes; "I have only to write it." As with the novelist so with the preacher.

4. The ease and effectiveness of the written sermon much depends upon careful preparation and a full plan. I have before me as I write two plans by very different preachers, Henry Ward Beecher and Cardinal Manning. The notes in each case are precisely as they left the preacher's hand; indeed both of them were carried into the pulpit and used there. What they have in common is an almost excessive minuteness in the elaboration of the theme. Beecher's[1] might serve as the table of contents of a volume; Manning's,[2] which was composed at the age of eighty-three, in fine, rapid handwriting, as the outline for a commentary. And I instance these two sermons because of the need that there is for insisting upon the importance of a well-studied plan. If the line of study which we have been suggesting be

[1] Gen. 12 : 1–3. [2] 1 John 4 : 19.

followed, the sermon plan will be sure to represent honest and conscientious work in thinking the subject through. It will illustrate the force of Emerson's remark, "Next to the knowledge of the fact and its law is method, which constitutes the genius and efficiency of all remarkable men." Remember Bourdaloue's maxim: "I can excuse a bad sermon sooner than a bad plan," and the excellent epigrams of a later preacher:[1] "Plan intensifies. Assurance of a purpose makes our work solid and consecutive. Plan concentrates energies as a burning-glass does sunbeams. Shiftlessness is only another name for aimlessness. Purpose directs energy, and purpose makes energy. We can because we think we can."

Without instituting an invidious comparison between the two, I believe that the preparation of the plan is of more real value than the writing out of the sermon; and this because the plan represents thought, the composition expression. Who does not envy John Foster when he could truthfully say of his own admirable style, "It is simply and absolutely formed for the thought; is adapted and flexible to it; and is taken out of the whole vocabulary of our language just on purpose for the thoughts and molded to their very shape"? Manifestly there must be thought worthy of such expression before there can be expression adequate to such thought.

[1] Dr. Parkhurst.

THE THEME—Continued

SUMMARY

Sermons may be arranged according to the character of their theme.

I. Doctrinal Sermons.

1. What is doctrinal preaching? Negatively: (1) Does not oppose the inculcation of morals; (2) Not necessarily apologetic; (3) Not necessarily polemical. Positively: (1) Emphatically didactic; (2) Philosophical; (3) Practical.
2. Why doctrinal preaching is important: (1) In the interests of preaching itself; (2) In the interests of the preacher; (3) In the interests of a sound and intelligent belief. The decay of such preaching leads to (*a*) The preaching of mechanical formulas, or (*b*) Preaching sermons without a Christian basis; (4) In the interests of moral reformation.

II. Ethical Sermons. Definition. Classification.

1. Sermons enforcing personal duties: (1) Demanded by the claims of religion; (2) And by right living.
2. Sermons enforcing relative duties.

III. Historical Sermons.

1. True to the method of Scripture.
2. In sympathy with our own instincts.
3. On a line with prevailing taste.

Note. Care to be taken in this kind of preaching.

IV. Experimental Sermons.

Why seldom heard of; Value.

Four-fold aim: To stimulate, comfort, correct, instruct.

V. Occasional Sermons.

Classification. Importance.

IX

THE THEME (CONTINUED)

SERMONS may conveniently be arranged on the basis of the character of their themes. Although it should be understood that the sermon need not confine itself rigidly within the limits of any one arbitrary division to the neglect of others which ought to be considered, yet such a classification has its advantages. We suggest the following grouping as sufficient for our purpose: Doctrinal, ethical, historical, experimental, and occasional sermons.

Classification of Sermons

I. Doctrinal Sermons.

1. We begin by asking, what do we understand by doctrinal preaching?

Let it be made clear at once that there are certain things which we do not mean.

(1) For example: Doctrinal preaching neither ignores nor opposes the inculcation of morality. Who indeed can say where dogma ends and morality begins?[1] Should not a doctrine lie at the foundation of every duty, and a duty rise as the superstructure from every doctrine?[2] "Treat doctrines practically," counsels Dr. J. W. Alexander, "and experience argumentatively." What moral

[1] Lane, "Life of Alex. Vinet," p. 147. [2] Prov. 23 : 7.

applications are more convincing than those of Jonathan Edwards? Yet they are found in the very sermons which are most powerful in their doctrinal basis.[1]

(2) Nor again, is doctrinal preaching necessarily apologetic. The protest of Robert Hall was needed more in his day than it is in our own, and yet it is in place still: "It is degrading to the dignity of a revelation established through a succession of ages by indisputable proof to be adverting every moment to the hypothesis of its being an imposture; to be inviting every insolent sophist to wrangle with us about the title, when we should be cultivating the possession."[2] "Christianity," observed George III., when he was presented with Bishop Watson's "Apology for Christianity," "needs no apology"; and Maurice is no doubt right when he insists that "theology is made the weakest of all studies because its basis is laid—as the basis of no other study is laid—in apology."

(3) Still less is doctrinal preaching necessarily polemical. Accustom yourself in preaching to explain. Make your hearers understand the matter in hand by means of clear statement.[3] Then, if it still be necessary to do so, argue. If you must deal with a doctrine polemically or apologetically, preach it historically; find its basis in Scripture, trace its subsequent course, and in this

[1] *E. g.*, sermon on Acts 16 : 29, 30.
[2] "Works," Vol. II., p. 299.
[3] See Dean Swift's "Letter to a Young Clergyman."

way lay a firm foundation for any conclusions which you may wish to draw.[1]

What then is doctrinal preaching? Passing now to the positive answer to our question, we reply:

(1) It is, first, emphatically didactic. It is fitted to instruct.[2] If it follows a line of biblical induction, gathering and grouping all the passages which bear upon a certain doctrine, the true doctrinal sermon does so for the sake of its practical application to the spiritual life of the hearers.[3] Doctrinal preaching should therefore be scriptural. All the doctrines with which the preacher needs to deal he must find in the Bible, and he will do well to confine himself in the main to the doctrines on which the Bible lays the most emphasis.

(2) At the same time it should be philosophical, inasmuch as it treats of the laws by which we are governed. Almost all great doctrinal preachers have been metaphysicians, and indeed some of them have been tempted to make their metaphysics prominent at the expense of their Bibles. We are set in the pulpit not so much to defend the ways of God to men, as to declare them. The preacher, especially if he has only lately exchanged the air of the schools for the freer breezes of everyday life, must guard himself against the use of philosophical, metaphysical, and even theological terms in the pulpit. Such phrases as "original sin," "total depravity," "the imputation of Adam's

[1] Dale, "Yale Lectures," pp. 71, 72. [2] 2 Tim. 3 : 16, 17.
[3] Taylor, "Yale Lectures," p. 155.

sin to his posterity," and such terms as "the Trinity," "the procession of the Holy Ghost," mean little or nothing to our hearers. As well talk of "consubstantiation," or "monism," or "trichotomy." Use great plainness of speech. Cause the people to understand, as did Ezra from his pulpit of wood.[1] Translate the terminology of the schools into the vernacular of Scripture. If it will not bear translation, it will not bear preaching. You will do well to remember that alike in its vocabulary and in its methods of statement biblical theology is the true theology for us to preach.

(3) If doctrinal preaching must be scriptural and philosophical, it must also be practical. Beware then, of simply exposing error, for "even when conversed with for good ends error is perturbing, paining, defiling, misleading, and wasteful of time."[2] See to it that to every setting forth of doctrine there is a practical application. You may find it hard to mingle doctrine and practice in due proportion in your preaching; but this is what you need to do. The late Prof. Elmslie "seldom preached," we are told, "on the formal doctrines of theology, but they were latent and implied in every sermon he delivered." Longfellow hears a discourse two hours long on the Atonement, and confesses himself quite bewildered after the first five minutes; and there is a touch of not unkindly sarcasm in the added words in his journal, "We came out in a drenching rain."

[1] Neh. 8 : 8. [2] J. W. Alexander.

2. Let us pass on to inquire why doctrinal preaching is important?

(1) The history of the pulpit furnishes us with our first answer. It is important in the interests of preaching itself. "Through constant changes in the direction of interests, theological themes remain the themes of supreme interest to thinking men."[1] In the hands of a skilled and competent preacher doctrinal preaching is of all preaching the most popular. The throngs never tired of gathering to hear C. H. Spurgeon, perhaps the most doctrinal preacher of our century. From the beginning of his ministry in Birmingham Dr. Dale preached doctrinal sermons, and when he was warned at the outset that his congregation would not stand it, he answered sturdily, "They will have to stand it." They stood it so well that he spent his life with that one church, and never preached more doctrinally or with greater acceptance than at the last. We may grant that to preach doctrine well is not easy, but the pulpit has always declined under easy preaching as it has always risen in power and importance when it has braced itself to grapple with great subjects.

(2) It is inevitable therefore that doctrinal preaching should be important, in the interests of the preacher. It will be of immense spiritual benefit to him to be moving among high things. He will not only feel what Dean Stanley called "the consolidating effect of an arduous and sustained

[1] President Eliot, Harvard University.

effort," but, better far, he will share the experience of Jonathan Edwards, who when he felt his heart growing cold used to regain the spiritual glow by reading for an hour in the deepest doctrines. "Thicken your exhortation with doctrine," Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, said to the Oxford students of his day; and this because the preacher himself needs to strike his roots deep in the great truths of his religion. An Oxford professor of our own time—himself a preacher—advises his brethren to read scientific theology for an hour at least every day, instead of "running from house to house for committee and other meetings."[1] "We shall never have great preachers," said Spurgeon, "till we have great divines."[2]

(3) We add that doctrinal preaching is important in the interests of a sound and intelligent belief. History bears us out in saying that the decay of doctrinal preaching is invariably followed by the decay of evangelical faith. It leads to one of two extremes: Sometimes to the preaching of mechanical dogmatic formulas, and to the use of words which once glowed with the fervor and passion of personal experience, but out of which the fires have now died, leaving in their stead only gray and melancholy ashes. The phrase "only believe," for example, if it fail to mean to us what it meant to Wesley and to Whitefield, means little or nothing. There is no virtue in our using his-

[1] Professor Shuttleworth.

[2] "Lectures to My Students," Series I., Lecture X.

toric terms which were formerly the battle cries of spiritual liberty unless our hearts also burn with some measure of the faith which once exulted in them. A bare recital of the mere externals of Christ's earthly life is not preaching the gospel. "The gospel becomes a gospel by the presence of the doctrine as touching the person of Jesus, that he is the Son of God; as touching his death that he is the sacrifice for the sins of the world." [1]

At other times the decline of doctrinal preaching leads to substituting for it sermons which inculcate moral duties indeed, but do so without any Christian basis. The orthodoxy of the Protestant church of Germany in the last century, for example, by becoming only dogmatic, drove multitudes of thoughtful men into rationalism, because at least that did insist on morality of life as of prime moment. Before long this, in its turn, became powerless to influence conduct, and so prepared the way for the message of Schleiermacher, welcome as the first breath of spring, as it insisted on the vital connection between true morality and a conscious dependence on the living God. Ignoring the natural enmity of the mind to God, Thomas Chalmers, at the beginning of his ministry, prosecuted, as he says, the actual though undesigned experiment of preaching a high code of morality, pressing on his people "reformation of honor and truth and integrity." But he confesses, "I never heard of any such reformations

[1] Dr. Maclaren.

having been effected amongst them." Not till he insisted on the alienation of the heart from God, and urged upon their acceptance the free offer of forgiveness through the blood of Christ, with the kindred doctrines of grace, did he hear of any moral betterment among his hearers. "You have taught me," he said in his farewell words to his congregation at Kilmeny, "that to preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches; and out of your humble cottages have I gathered a lesson which I pray God that I may be enabled to carry with all its simplicity into a wider theatre."[1]

(4) After what has been said it needs scarcely be added that doctrinal preaching is important in the interests of moral reformation. Always the rise and fall of morality has coincided with the rise and fall of religion. This has been the case in all ages, and in all lands.[2]

"Ethical injunctions will not save man; the experiment has been widely tried, and it has always been a sad and conspicuous failure."[3] We may question the fairness of the comparison which Luther institutes between himself and his fellow-reformers, but we cannot question the truth which it expressed. That is secure from challenge: "Wicliffe and Huss," he says, "assailed the immoral conduct of papists; but I chiefly oppose and

[1] Hanna, "Life of Chalmers," Vol. I., Chaps. XV., XVI.
[2] Dr. E. G. Robinson, "Christianity and Ethics," Lecture IV.
[3] Dr. Behrends, "Yale Lectures," Lecture II.

resist their doctrine. I affirm roundly and plainly that they preach not the truth—to this I am called. When I can show that the papists' doctrine is false, then I can easily prove that their manner of life is evil. For when the word remains pure, the manner of life, though something therein be amiss, will be pure also." [1]

II. In the Ethical Sermon, to which we next turn, special stress is laid on the moral side of the subject to be treated. While the doctrinal basis is either implied or briefly expounded, the main body of the discourse concerns itself with the ethical aspects of the theme. How important is this group of sermons we shall better understand by attempting to classify them.

1. First, then, come sermons which enforce personal duties.

(1) The claims of religion demand that such sermons shall be preached. It is a fatal mistake, and yet one which is very prevalent, to affirm that Christianity has little to do with practical morality. To what disastrous consequences this error leads we have already seen. Yet it is favored by two opposing classes of men: by the unbeliever, who has a vague impression that religion has to do exclusively with our duties to God; and by the professing Christian, who dreads a paralysis of faith as the result of insisting upon works.[2]

But this conception of the limits of religion is

[1] Luther, "Table Talk," No. CCCCXV.

[2] Preface to "Sermons," by Sydney Smith, 1801.

untrue to fact. As we have said in considering doctrinal sermons, no divorce should be proclaimed between faith and practice in the preaching of Christian truth.[1] Let us set the matter in its true light by preaching upon personal duties. Of Philip Henry, his son Matthew says that he was "very large and particular in pressing second-table duties." This insistence on the aspect of the decalogue which looks toward man is essential if justice is to be done to its Godward aspect also. So Thomas Arnold counsels his hearers: "Begin by regarding everything from the moral point of view, and you will end by believing God."

(2) Nor are such sermons any less important if we widen our view and include right living generally. How intensely practical must have been the preaching of Paul when it led the sorcerers of Ephesus at a great cost to themselves to burn their books of magic,[2] and left to Onesimus, the runaway slave, no other alternative but to go back to his master.[3] Moral results which no one could gainsay accompanied the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century in Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland; the Puritans, who were ardently attached to doctrinal preaching, drew recruits to their ranks by the correctness of their lives; and the Methodist revival made the tradesman throw away his light weight and unjust balance. Mr. Gladstone charges the clergy of to-day with not being severe

[1] Hatch, "Hibbert Lectures," Lecture VI.
[2] Acts 19 : 19. [3] Philemon.

enough on their congregations. "They do not," he says, "sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts, and bring up their whole life and action to the bar of conscience." No praise which he received pleased Carlyle more than the testimony of a tanner whose manufactures were remarkable for their uniform excellence, and who said, "If I had not read Carlyle, I should never have made my leather so good." The preacher will do well to accustom himself to find what is the moral meaning of the popularity of the book just then in most demand, of the fame of the public hero of the hour, of the event by which men are most deeply moved in war or politics, in commerce or in the life of the community; and having found it, let him make it the theme of a discourse.

2. We enlarge our circle, although the center remains the same, when we pass to relative duties. Courtesy, considerateness, magnanimity, truthfulness, should receive distinct treatment in the pulpit. "Be not afraid," said Robert Hall to a young minister, "of devoting whole sermons to particular parts of moral conduct and religious duty." The historian Froude brings a grave indictment against the pulpit when he says: "Many a hundred sermons have I heard in England . . . but never during thirty years one that I can recollect on common honesty or those primitive commandments, 'Thou shalt not lie' and 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Under this head we may place sermons upon matters which should interest us as citizens, such as sanitation, temperance, social reforms, and questions touching on our relations to the community in which we live. No event which moves the public mind should be suffered to pass without reference being made to it in our preaching. Without a suspicion of sensationalism we can so deal with current topics that our hearers shall be in no doubt as to what the Christian religion teaches as to the life that now is.

III. Historical Sermons stand in a class by themselves, inasmuch as they exemplify and enforce important ethical principles from Scripture history, and especially from the great characters depicted in its pages.

1. This kind of preaching is true to the method of Scripture, which in its narrative parts deals so largely with individual lives, clustering about them current events, and illustrating by means of them the evolution of history.

2. The preacher who can handle well a Scripture character is sure of the attention of a very large proportion of his congregation. "A story," says Cecil, "will hold a child by the ear for an hour together, and men are but children of a larger growth."

3. Nor is it a point of slight importance that he who learns how to preach thus falls in with the prevailing literary taste. History as it is written by Carlyle or Froude or Motley or Green deals to

a very large extent with the lives of great leaders in their relations to the age in which they lived.

I say "he who learns" to preach sermons cast in the historical mold, because whether the faculty for telling a story be natural to the preacher or acquired, it will cost him pains to make the best use of it. Mere pictorial description is of little service. The homiletical features should be preserved in the sermon or lecture. Ample scope should be given to application and appeal. The preacher, like the traveler in the mazes of the Roman Catacombs, should carry with him the clue which keeps him in connection with the sunlight of his own day. Of John Angell James, of Birmingham, England, his biographer says: "In historical sermons he was very successful. Unlike many preachers who tell the story in their introduction and fill the rest of the discourse with mere didactic matter, he interwove the narrative with the instruction, and the climax of the story was often wrought into the peroration. Indeed he could tell the facts in a way that made it almost unnecessary formally to state the 'moral.'"[1]

IV. John Angell James represents a class of preachers to whom the church and the world owe far more than they will ever acknowledge, because their sermons are so largely experimental that while powerfully affecting their own congregations, they are seldom heard of elsewhere.

Of the proverbially short-lived human fame of

[1] Dale, "Life of J. A. James," p. 616.

the preacher they furnish the most conspicuous example. Listened to with reverence and love while living, a few years suffice to make even the names of such preachers strange in our ears. Their record is in heaven, and the influence of their discourses remains among those potent but little recognized forces by which unconsciously to ourselves whole generations are molded. Here it is that the value of the Experimental Sermon—the next group in our present classification—lies. It deals with the religious experience of Christian people and concerns itself with the practical and often unheroic piety of the believer's life—with the joys and sorrows, with the trials and temptations of the soul.

The aim of experimental preaching is four-fold. By appealing to the promises and injunctions of the Christian religion it stimulates the believer; it finds in the same treasure-house consolation for the mourner in his bereavement, and for the troubled heart in its trials; enforcing the high standard of the New Testament, it recalls men and women immersed in worldly matters to Christian consciousness; and by throwing light on the various duties of practical piety it instructs a congregation in the conduct of daily life.

The preacher who excels as a pastor will never find himself at a loss for experimental themes, his visits to his people and the incidents of church life will furnish themes in abundance, while his own spiritual life will reveal to him alike the

depths in which lie the darkest shadows, and the mountain-peaks where he may "summer high among the saints of God."

V. Under the class, Occasional Sermons, we put the discourses which every preacher must prepare to deliver, but which lie outside the circle of his ordinary pulpit themes. He should not neglect the lessons of special times and seasons, such as the new and the old year, Easter and Christmas, when he will be assured that by speaking on the thought which is in every mind he has a point of great importance in his favor. He should never let patriotic occasions pass by without notice. Thanksgiving he should make worthy of its name, and redeem it from the charge which is with much reason brought against it, that by giving to the preacher a wider range it allows him the chance to indulge in lamentations over current abuses in government and society that are oftener than not as vain as they are lugubrious. On the other hand, without becoming a partisan, he is bound to insist on every proper occasion upon the national honor, upon the duty of the citizen to vote, and upon the influence of Christian chivalry on the heart of the community. The history of the American ministry is rich in the stirring appeals of true patriots, and up to the present time the sermon has wielded an immense power in directing and controlling the policy of the American people.

To the same class also belong sermons on

philanthropic subjects, such as International Arbitration, Kindness to Animals, Temperance. We reach the widest circle and one of transcendent moment when we mention Christian missions and their claims on the Christian congregation. In his ordinary ministry the preacher should deal with this lofty and inspiring theme. It is impossible to close our eyes to the fact that to ignorance about missions and to culpable indifference to their paramount and imperious importance on the part of a majority of Christian preachers, we owe it that only on rare occasions, and invariably as a prelude to a collection, do we hear discourses on the very theme which inspired the earthly mission of Jesus and the labors of his apostles. No Sunday should ever pass without distinct reference being made to missions in the prayers, the psalmody, or the sermon of the public service.

PARTS OF THE SERMON

SUMMARY

The Introduction compared to: (1) The prelude of a poem; (2) The preface to a book; (3) The portico of a building; (4) The opening of a law case.

I. Purposes Served by the Introduction.

1. Draws attention to the text and to the theme: (1) Addresses the whole nature; (2) Exegesis most fitting at this stage in the sermon.
2. Brings preacher and hearer into touch.

Counsels as to manner, tone, and spirit.

II. Characteristics of the Introduction.

1. Should be pertinent: (1) No matter to be admitted which is foreign to the text; (2) Or to the theme; (3) In few words should indicate the line of thought to be pursued.
2. Should be brief. Introduces text and audience. Five minutes sufficient.
3. Should be natural: (1) Avoid a florid style; (2) Avoid complicated sentences; (3) Avoid exaggeration; (4) On an easy level of discourse; (5) The tone of voice, clear, calm, deliberate.
4. Should be worthy of engaging the hearer's attention: (1) The subject a serious one; (2) Jesting and frivolity to be avoided; (3) Yet thought may be put in a fresh way.

X

PARTS OF THE SERMON

THE introduction to the sermon presupposes that the discourse is a complete structure and not a disjointed fragment. In this it is not singular, but takes its place in line with other forms of composition. We shall more readily understand the true nature and purpose of the introduction if we illustrate this remark by three or four comparisons.

I. The Introduction

1. It may be likened, for example, to the prelude of a poem which has to bear some proportion to the poem itself. "Paradise Lost" is introduced by only twenty-five lines of stately verse. The magnitude of the subject does not admit of dallying on the threshold. So ought it to be with the sermon. "The King's business requires haste."

2. Or it may be compared to the preface to a a book; and indeed many preachers carry the resemblance in this instance so far that the introduction to their sermon is the last part of it to be composed, perhaps on Pascal's principle—only with another application—that the last thing a man finds out when he is writing a book is how to begin. Yet if the sermon has been carefully developed it

is tolerably certain that during the process the introduction, in common with other parts, will have suggested itself. The man who knows the rooms of a house is likely to be familiar with the front door. And we venture to counsel that, as a rule, if no introduction suggests itself while you are developing the theme, it will be safe to assume that none is needed. Then have none. There is no law obliging every sermon to have an introduction, as there is no law obliging every book to have a preface. The charm of surprise will sometimes be given to a sermon by beginning it at once without any kind of preamble.

3. What has just been said reminds us that an introduction may be further likened to the portico of a public building, and here the resemblance is even closer. The portico should be of the same style as the main structure, it should be harmonious with it in design, it should be modest in its proportion, and severe rather than florid in its character, and it should not attract too much attention to itself, but rather lead at once into the building. To fail in any of these particulars is as unfortunate in homiletics as it is in architecture.

4. No less apt is the comparison which sees points of resemblance between the introduction to the sermon and the opening of a case in law. A well-known authority gives some sound advice to young advocates which is equally applicable to young preachers, and indeed to older ones as well, if they be not past profiting by it: "Slow, sure,

and short is a good motto. A long opening is wearisome and unnecessary, and it can only be made so by repetition."[1] Nowhere are compactness, rapidity of approach, directness, and singleness of aim more admirable than in introducing the subject of discourse.

What we have to say as to the introduction of the sermon may be arranged under the two divisions of the purposes which it answers and the characteristics by which it should be distinguished.

I. We first consider the purposes served by the introduction.

1. It should arrest and insure attention to the text and to the subject of discourse.

(1) To do this let the preacher as far as possible address the whole nature. You have to speak to a variety of faculties. Have a word therefore for the intellect, for the moral nature, for the soul. In the few moments at your disposal make the theme of the sermon quite clear and in a natural way lead to the divisions of your discourse.

(2) Nothing is so likely to do this as exegesis; and although exegesis should not be confined to the introduction nor the introduction to exegesis, yet it is nowhere so happy as here. A sermon by Dr. Maclaren on "The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God"[2] is aptly introduced by an explanation of the words "glorious" and "blessed," putting the apostle's thought in this new and striking

[1] Richard Harris, "Hints on Advocacy," p. 44.

[2] 1 Tim. 1 : 11.

form: "The Gospel of the Glory of the Happy God." Then the divisions of his subject grew out of the exegesis: (1) The revelation of God in Christ of which the gospel is the record is the glory of God; (2) that revelation is, in a very profound sense, the blessedness of God; (3) and lastly, that revelation is the good news for men.

2. A second purpose which the introduction should serve is to bring the preacher and his hearers into touch with one another. Here and at once the personality of the preacher should be felt. The man back of the sermon must be recognized now, although he may perhaps fall into the shade later on before the higher interests of his theme; as the architect is seen at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of his building, and after that may be seen no more. It is of importance that our hearers be interested in us not so much for our sake as for the sake of our mission and message. The voice of John the Baptist loses nothing of its impressiveness, because a few touches give us the gaunt figure and simple life of the forerunner.

A preacher's manner, his tones, his attitude even, serve to introduce him to his hearers and to enlist their interest in him. He may repel or attract his auditors before he has been speaking five minutes. Let him take a graceful and dignified posture, let him avoid all gestures at first, let him be courteous, conciliatory, and respectful in tone, and in spirit modest, unassuming, and earnest,

and almost before he has opened up his subject he has gained the first step which counts for so much.

A noble illustration of both these purposes which should be served by the introduction will be found in the opening sentences of the first sermon which Massillon preached before Louis XIV., of France. For even the worldliest courtier present it must have been hard indeed not to feel interested alike in the subject and in the preacher of the discourse. His text was "Blessed are they that mourn."[1] What more natural than that he should begin with reference to his choice of text, which must already have repelled an audience little accustomed to connect sorrow with happiness? "Sire, if the world were speaking here, instead of Jesus Christ, assuredly it would not address your majesty in the same language." After picturing the flattering words with which it would approach him, the preacher suddenly changes his tone: "But, sire, Jesus Christ does not speak as the world speaks. Happy, he says to you, not he who wins the admiration of the present world but who is occupied with the world to come, and lives in a contempt of himself and all that passes away, because to him belongs the kingdom of heaven. Happy, not he whose reign will be immortalized in history, but he whose tears will have blotted out the history of his sins from the remembrance of God himself, because he shall be comforted forever.

[1] Matt. 5 : 4.

'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'"[1]

II. We pass from the purposes of the introduction to consider its prominent characteristics.

1. Evidently the first of these is what we may call pertinency. The introduction should be applicable to the theme of the sermon, and to its occasion.

(1) No matter should be found in it which is foreign to the text; any tendency to divagation must be severely put down; the hearer's attention must be seized, and the direction of his thought determined. To go wrong so early will be to imperil the whole discourse, and Mr. Ruskin's maxim, that it is the first half-dozen strokes that determine the portrait, holds good in preaching as much as in painting.

(2) Nor, for the same reason, should any matter which is foreign to the theme be admitted. Side controversies must not at this point be considered.

(3) Employ your introduction wisely, and with a few strokes you can carry the audience at once into the heart of your subject. If text and theme be kept in view in the introduction, the special line of thought which is to be pursued in the sermon may be readily indicated; and sometimes the divisions can even be formally mentioned. How admirably is this managed in a sermon by one of the most imaginative preachers of our time![2] He pro-

[1] "Quarterly Review," October, 1884; Art., "Massillon."

[2] The Rev. Mark Guy Pearse.

poses to tell once more the parable of the Prodigal Son. "Doctors," he begins, "take violets to make physic of them; preachers take the Lord's stories, and make sermons of them. Well, the process is much the same, spoiling the beauty to get the good. One wishes we could keep the violet and have the physic still; one wishes we could keep the story and have the sermon still. I would almost venture to-night to try and enlarge the Lord's story without letting it lose its story form." Then he goes on to suggest this division: (*a*) What the lad asked for, or what all sin is; (*b*) where he went, or what all sin does; (*c*) how he came home, or how all sin is remedied.

2. Secondly, the introduction should be brief. The rustic when he obtains possession of your hand knows no better than to retain it for five minutes and keep it going like the pendulum of his grandmother's clock. When he learns better manners he finds that a momentary grasp is sufficient even to cement the friendship of monarchs. In your introduction take the theme by one hand and the audience by the other, make them acquainted, and then drop the hands and get to work as soon as possible. The introduction, in other words, must bear a modest proportion to the sermon itself. An old woman who listened to John Howe, the Puritan, a preacher very partial to long introductions, said that "he was so long in laying the cloth that she began to despair of getting any dinner." Five minutes out of the thirty granted

to the sermon should be ample. You have not to expand ideas, but only to indicate them. The preacher who expatiates in his introduction will be insufferably prolix in his sermon, if he preserve any proportion in it.[1]

3. Thirdly, the introduction should be natural. Avoid even more carefully here than later on in the discourse a florid style.

(1) As a rule it is not wise to begin with an appeal to the imagination or to the fancy. "In an opening speech" (such is the counsel given to lawyers), "illustration should be utterly abandoned. Fact, and fact alone, is the strength of an opening speech."[2]

(2) Of course there have been preachers who in this as in other matters were a law unto themselves. Dr. Guthrie could afford to open with a vivid picture, but he was the prince of illustrative preachers, and has perhaps no legitimate successor.[3]

(3) The sentences with which the discourse begins should be brief, well compacted, and carefully composed. When a preacher opens his sermon by saying, "The most wonderful, the most comprehensive, and yet the least regarded and perhaps the most mutilated text in the Bible is before our attention this evening,"[4] we make no mistake in deciding that we have also before our attention

[1] See Scripture models: Matt. 13 : 3; Acts 7 : 2; 17 : 22.

[2] Harris "Advocacy," p. 29.

[3] *E. g.*, "Speaking to the Heart," Sermon II. [4] Mark 16 : 16.

a speaker who has yet to learn how to be at the same time less positive and less superlative. By starting with four assertions in one breath he makes any further attention almost impossible for hearers whose minds are constructed on ordinary principles. Who among us at once and simultaneously can concentrate his thought on four general statements, any one of which lies open to serious challenge?

(4) By all means let the preacher keep clear of hyperbole at a time when he has not the fervor of oratory to plead in extenuation. Exaggeration is not vivid or impressive in an introduction. It is only weak and irritating, as all forcible feebleness is apt to be.[1] Moderation may often be combined with force, but exaggeration never.

(5) It is natural to add that the sermon should begin on an easy level. Do not start out at an ambitious elevation, lest you discover how fatally facile is the descent. Your hearers must join you, and in order to do this you will have to pick them up. By and by you can mount with them; but even a balloon soars from a level and not from a mountain top.

(6) This simplicity of thought should be accompanied by a tone of voice befitting it. Be clear-toned, calm, and deliberate. The young speaker, often through sheer nervousness, commences his discourse in a strident note, or in a tone which is magisterial and authoritative, or with a rapidity of

[1] Harris, "Advocacy," pp. 39–41.

utterance which deprives his first half-dozen sentences of all meaning, and leaves a proportion of his congregation behind at the very start. The chances are that so they will remain; for by the time they have regained their breath and are prepared to listen, the preacher is already far on in his first division.

4. Fourthly, the introduction should be worthy of engaging the attention of intelligent hearers.

It should befit a serious subject. When Massillon began his funeral sermon on Louis the Great with the words, "My brethren, God only is great," every one felt that at once a deep chord had been struck. By all means, therefore, avoid even the semblance of jesting or frivolity. This would be to prelude an oratorio with a few bars from a comic opera. The ambassador for Christ has no ambition to be like Laurence Sterne, who often opened his sermons with a quip, and of whom it was said that all the while he preached he seemed as though at any moment he might fling his wig in the face of his congregation. Although our art be far inferior to that of Sterne, who was without any question one of the great masters of exquisite style, still we may often succeed in putting our thought in a way so fresh and impressive that the interest of the congregation shall be aroused from the very first sentence. Yet this should be done with so much simplicity and sincerity that no doubt remains on the part of our hearers as to our spirit and purpose. Chrysostom

had every ear attentive when preaching just after an earthquake he began his sermon, "Do you see the power of God? Do you see the benignity of God? His power because the solid world he has shaken; his benignity because the fallen world he has supported."[1] While entirely free from any suspicion of sensationalism this was timely and novel.

Remember, then, that nothing is so impressive as simplicity. A natural manner, an easy level of tone and of language, and a clear but vigorous line of thought are features which should distinguish the introduction.

[1] Phelps, "Theory of Preaching," p. 262.

PARTS OF THE SERMON—Continued

SUMMARY

The natural cleavage of texts. The chief purpose of the Introduction.

I. The Advantages of Having Divisions in the Sermon.

1. To the preacher. (1) They hold him down to the sermon model: (2) They assist him in composing the sermon; (*a*) Evidence consecutive thought; (*b*) Train him to think consecutively; (3) They assist him in delivering the sermon: (*a*) Make it an articulated whole; (*b*) Aid emphasis; (*c*) And make transition easy.
2. To the hearer. (1) Excite interest; (2) Assist the mind; (3) Produce the right effect.

II. The Right Treatment of Divisions.

1. Should divisions be apparent throughout the sermon?
2. Should divisions be announced?
3. At what time should divisions be announced?

III. As to the Number of the Divisions.

1. Uniformity unreasonable.
2. Have as few divisions as possible.
3. The present fashion is for three main divisions.

IV. Qualities which should be found in Divisions.

1. Interesting. (1) Study freshness; (2) But be true to the meaning of the text; (3) Eccentricity not justified.
2. Clear.
3. Progressive.
4. Symmetrical; (1) There must be proportion in the parts; Should be related to one another in the progress of thought; (2) Should bear a due proportion to one another; (3) Should bear recapitulation.

XI

PARTS OF THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

EVERY text on which a sermon can be preached has a natural cleavage. There are certain points at which it can best be split open, and divided naturally. These points of cleavage are what we have in mind when we speak of the partition or division of the sermon. The introduction serves its chief purpose when it leads up to the cleavage of the text, and suggests the lines of analysis which are to be followed.

The Divisions

I. Before proceeding further let us glance at the advantages alike to preacher and hearer in having divisions in the sermon.

1. To the preacher the first advantage is, that divisions hold him down to the sermon model.

(1) They save him from committing the rhetorical blunder of writing an essay and calling it a sermon. All effective speakers use divisions, although they may not be formally announced, or be even apparent on the surface. Archdeacon Paley, who has no superior in the art of writing clear English, says what every hearer of sermons knows to be true: "A discourse which rejects these aids to perspicuity will turn out a bewildered rhapsody, without aim or effect, order or conclusion."

(2) Another advantage to the preacher in having divisions in his sermon is that they assist him in composing his discourse. (*a*) They are evidences of consecutive thought. They do not so much belong to the art of expression as to the art of thinking. They are philosophical rather than rhetorical. (*b*) This statement can be reversed and still remain true. Divisions train the preacher to think consecutively. For this reason an imperfect or faulty development of the text almost certainly means an imperfect or faulty development of the theme. I venture to press this two-fold statement to its logical conclusion, and to assert that a sermon which fails under analysis cannot be a good sermon. By something akin to that providence which is said to watch over intemperate persons and children, it may do good; but in itself it is not good. We may illustrate what we mean from the art of painting. "A painter," says Mulready, who was himself an artist, "cannot take a step without anatomy." The greatest masters of figure painting, such as Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci, studied anatomy as diligently as though they had intended to become surgeons. Their figures were first drawn in the nude and then draped. And so a sermon must be built up, the skeleton first, then flesh and the clothing.

(3) Further, divisions help the preacher when he comes to deliver his sermon. (*a*) Thanks to them, it is impressed upon his mind as an articulated organism. Whatever his plans of delivery

may be, he should be master of the contents of his discourse. This is where divisions are so helpful. They insure method, and "without method memory is useless." (*b*) They also help him in emphasizing his thought. To lay stress where it is not called for is like putting your foot down on level ground when you expected to find a descent. The whole system is shaken when it should have been sustained. There are levels in sermons—often, alas, the level is unbroken and then it is a dead level—but in the best of sermons there are smooth and even passages where the mind rests. Why emphasize them? Nothing is more tiresome, nothing less impressive, than perpetual intensity. (*c*) And, moreover, to mention another important point in their favor to the preacher, divisions assist him in his transitions from one point to the next. They are rungs in his ladder, and if at any period in the delivery of his discourse he finds his memory fail, falter, or refuse to do its work, he must at his leisure examine the plan just there. Most likely a rung is missing and the angels of thought, who wear no wings for the preacher, but tread the common rhetorical stairway, cannot pass up or down.

2. What advantages to the hearer are served by divisions?

(1) Contrary to a belief which has become very general in consequence of clumsy sermonizing, I believe that divisions excite interest in the minds of our hearers. They foster expectation, like a

catalogue of fine paintings over which you run your eye before entering the gallery.

(2) Certainly they assist the mind to understand and carry away the particular line of thought which the preacher is enforcing. Even though it is true that at times they seem to break the force of an address, yet "if they are conjunctive and not disjunctive, they aid the memory without materially weakening the effects of the sermon at the time."[1] You must consider how many of your hearers are unused to logical thought. Assist them to follow your message, and you have gone a long way toward assisting them to accept it.

(3) Besides, the clear and natural partition of your subject is likely to produce the precise effect aimed at in your sermon. Every discourse which deserves the name must have an aim, and the divisions assist the preacher in taking his sight as a skillful marksman should do. This point—and this—and this, are they all in line?—then the discharge is likely to hit the mark. I commend to every preacher a little bit of noble English in which John Bright contrasts his oratory with that of W. E. Gladstone. "Gladstone goes coasting along turning up every creek and exploring it to its source before he can proceed on his way; but I have no talent for detail. I hold my course from headland to headland through the great seas." Divisions are the headlands by which the speaker holds his course through the great seas of thought.

[1] J. A. James, "Life," p. 477.

II. We pass on to consider the right treatment of divisions. Here there are three questions to be asked and answered.

1. First, should the divisions be made apparent throughout the sermon? Certainly they should. If you are treating your subject logically and progressively, it is surely right that any intelligent hearer should be told just where he is. Why should he not know the plan of a discourse as he knows the plan of a house? He does not mistake the parlor for the dining room. Why should he mistake the first division for the third? Each should have its own furniture. Nor need the sermon become rigid or mechanical because the arrangement is evident. "The divisions of a church," says Mr. Ruskin, "are much like the divisions of a sermon; they are always right so long as they are necessary to edification, and always wrong when they are thrust upon the attention as divisions only." Phillips Brooks preached what he practised when he declared that "the true way to get rid of the boniness of a sermon is not by leaving out the skeleton, but by clothing it with flesh."

2. Second, should the divisions be announced? Why not? The custom has the authority of long usage. It comes to us from the Roman forum, and from the masters of eloquence who mentally associating the heads of a speech with certain localities around them, spoke of "the first place," "second place," and so coined a phrase which has

become universal.[1] To this day the political speaker on the stump and the advocate at the bar announce their points. Yet so radical are the differences between sermons that this question has to be decided mainly by the species to which each discourse belongs. In a topical sermon divisions need not be announced, and indeed there may be none; the topic in bulk is constantly held in view. In a textual sermon the words of the text, taken in their logical order, will generally furnish all the help that the hearer's memory needs without formal announcement. In a textual-topical sermon, on the contrary, the divisions should always be announced; and in an inferential sermon they should be indicated clearly as each advanced position is taken. In an expository sermon the words of the Scripture on which the exposition is based will of necessity be repeated at the critical points in the discourse, and this will serve the purposes of formal announcement.

3. Thirdly, if announced, at what time should this be done? I answer, have no fixed and invariable method. Sometimes announce the divisions immediately after the introduction; at other times—and this perhaps most frequently—content yourself with announcing the divisions when you come to them. Vary the custom, again, by first giving the division and then in one brief sentence characterizing its contents;[2] or, once more, by

[1] Phelps, "Theory," etc., pp. 370, 371.
[2] R. W. Dale, "Yale Lectures," pp. 140, 142.

announcing the thought of the division at its beginning and at its close.

But while we counsel announcement of divisions we caution the young preacher against pushing announcement any further. Never announce your sub-divisions. This is to court arithmetical confusion, and perhaps provoke unkindly feeling on the part of your hearers when they discover that they have been beguiled into thinking the end to be in sight although it was yet afar off. A congregation is almost invariably disappointed when it mistakes a way station for the terminus.

III. Something must be said at this point as to the number of the divisions in the sermon.

1. Uniformity in this matter is unreasonable. There can be no settled and arbitrary rule. The number of divisions in any discourse must evidently be determined by the species to which the sermon belongs and by the subject of which the sermon treats. The very fact that the preacher has to prepare so many discourses a week for so many months in the year, and for so many years of a pastorate, is apt to betray him into the hands of a dull inert uniformity, unless he is constantly on his guard. And perhaps this is why it will be found that almost every preacher has a favorite number of divisions, short of which his mind never stops, and beyond which his mind never goes.

2. As a rule, we should say, let the divisions be as few as possible. Mr. Spurgeon said that he always had most divisions when he had least to

divide. This is a confession which we little look for in him, but it is undoubtedly seemly from most preachers. The poor preacher like the poor family has often more mouths than meat. "I guess good housekeeping," says old Thomas Fuller, "not by the number of chimneys, but by the smoke." In preaching, as in architecture, the main lines on which the eye rests at once should be few. Impression is marred by multiplication. The taste at the present time is for two or three divisions, but it has not always been so. The Puritans delighted in the intricacies and involutions of the maze. Thomas Lye, discoursing on 1 Cor. 6 : 17, endeavors to explain the text "in thirty particulars for the fixing of it on a right basis, and then adds fifty-six more to explain the subject."[1] With a modesty which touches the sublime and an obscurity which comes equally near to the ridiculous he proceeds: "Having thus beaten up and leveled our way to the text, I shall not stand to shred the words into any unnecessary parts, but shall extract out of them such an observation as I conceive strikes a full eighth of the mind of the Spirit of God."

3. The prevalent fashion is for three main divisions. (1) For the preference for this number one reason was found by the mediæval church in the three persons of the Trinity; (2) but it is far more likely that it is due to convenience. The three-fold division of most subjects insures suffi-

[1] "Morning Exercises," Vol. V., Nichol's edition.

cient thoroughness of treatment, and yet escapes tediousness. The preacher readily remembers three points, the hearer as readily carries them away in his mind. The division into three is applicable to many texts. How better for instance can you treat the words of Pharaoh's daughter to the mother of Moses,[1] "Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages," than by considering in their order the nurse, the child, and the wages? But, on the other hand, it will often be found that while further analysis would reduce the number to two, the preacher is so wedded to his rule of three that he refuses to part with it. A sermon on the familiar text,[2] "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," etc., is happily divided into "First, what Paul thought was the gospel," and "Secondly, what Paul thought the gospel was." Why then add (as the preacher does), "Thirdly, what Paul felt about the gospel"? Is not this point really the conclusion? Does it not furnish a rare opportunity for personal appeal in closing the discourse?

Indeed, two divisions have been sufficient for some of the ablest preachers,[3] and where a third has been added it is often capable of ready demonstration that it might better be treated as a conclusion simply. Before it is reached the preacher oftener than not has spent his force. To tack so near port when there is just wind enough to

[1] Exod. 2 : 9. [2] Rom. 1 : 16.
[3] Bossuet, Fénelon, F. W. Robertson.

carry the ship in, is to prolong the voyage to no purpose.

IV. We will now enumerate some qualities which should be found in the divisions of discourse.

1. Endeavor then, first, to make your divisions interesting. Monotony of divisions, whether in the number or in the wording of them, is to be avoided.

(1) Study freshness in this matter. How admirable, for example, is the treatment of Paul's familiar injunction "Be careful for nothing," etc.,[1] which announces as a theme "Paul's Sure Cure for Care," and for division: I. A Precept. II. A Prescription. III. A Promise.[2] "Beelzebub Driving and Drowning his Hogs" is how John Burgess an earlier preacher, words his theme, and the expectation which this arouses is not disappointed by what follows: "In these words the devil verified three old English proverbs; which as they contain the general drift of my text[3] shall also contain the substance of this ensuing discourse. I. The devil will play at small game rather than none at all ('All the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine'). II. They run fast whom the devil drives ('When the unclean spirits entered into the swine the whole herd ran violently'). III. The devil brings his hogs to a fine market ('Behold the whole herd ran down a steep place into the sea')," etc.

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[1] Phil. 4 : 6, 7. [2] H. L. Wayland, D. D.
[3] Matt. 8 : 30–32.

(2) Yet remember that freshness of divisions must not be gained at the expense of the true meaning of the text. The German pastor of the last century who preached from the words,[1] "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered," violated this rule when he prepared to speak, I. Of our hair. II. Of the right use of the human hair. III. Of the memories, admonitions, warnings, and consolation that have come from the human hair. IV. Of how hair can be used in a Christian way."[2] And certainly the Puritan carried his advocacy of Calvinism into a strange court when he treated the words, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet,"[3] in this original way: "My brethren, we are here taught the doctrine of human depravity: 'Mephibosheth was lame.' Also the doctrine of total depravity: He was 'lame on both his feet.' Also the doctrine of justification: 'He dwelt in Jerusalem.' Fourth, the doctrine of adoption: 'He did eat at the king's table.' Fifth, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints: 'He did eat at the king's table continually.'

(3) A desire for freshness of division, again, does not justify the eccentricity which often borders so close on irreverence. That pregnant wit and excellent divine, Thomas Fuller, seems to exceed his commission as a preacher of truth and soberness

[1] Matt. 10 : 30. [2] Hurst, "History of Rationalism," p. 70.
[3] 2 Sam. 9 : 13.

when, discoursing on the text, "Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness,"[1] he dwells with most emphasis on the word "all," and details on the pillow, the bolster, the head, the feet, the sides, and so on: "All his bed."

2. That the divisions of a discourse should be clear is our next point. The meaning of each division ought to be made so evident when it is announced that it needs no further explanation. To explain a division is to define a definition. Here it is well to recall Daniel Webster's answer when he was asked how he obtained his clear ideas. He replied, "By attention to definitions." Spend much time, therefore, in simplifying the form in which divisions are cast, and the English in which they are expressed. Such a text as "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,"[2] is sublime in its suggestion of mystery, but what can justify the obscurity of this division of it in a recent discourse? "The text naturally divides itself into three parts: First, we have presented to us the transcendental properties of the divine nature. Second, we have the anthropomorphic relations under which those transcendental properties in the divine nature stand revealed and become apprehensible. Third, we have the appropriate symbolism by which those anthropomorphic relations and illustrations of the transcendental properties in the divine nature constitute worship."

[1] Ps. 41 : 3. [2] John 4 : 24.

Divisions which are quickly understood and readily remembered are the best. At a distance of several years an intelligent layman recalled a sermon which he had heard from a popular preacher on the fall of Samson, "The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes," etc.,[1] by its main points; which are indeed admirable in the perfection of their religious application: "The Blinding, Binding, and Grinding Effect of Sin." When the Rev. John McNeill, preaching from the words, "He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught,"[2] announces as his divisions, "Launching Out, Letting Down, and Leaving All," he makes sure that anyhow his hearers will remember the leading lines of his sermon. You may be certain that any confusion in divisions in your sermon, and any difficulty in keeping the thoughts expressed in them in their right places, must be traced to a lack of clearness. You have not attended to your fences, and the sheep are straying from one pasture to another. The remedy for this is not to run after each sheep that wanders, but to repair and strengthen your fences. These discursive thoughts—wandering stars in your firmament—owe their existence to your failure to observe Webster's principle to pay a great deal of attention to definition.

3. The divisions of a discourse should not only be interesting and clear, they should also be pro-

[1] Judg. 16 : 21. [2] Luke 5 : 4.

gressive. Are there times when in composing or in delivering your sermon you find it difficult to pass without a dislocating jar from one division to another? In all probability this arises from imperfect partition. Some link in your plan of thought is either lacking or superfluous. Observe it therefore as a law in homiletics that divisions should be logical and practical. They must be in their right place in the discourse, and they must serve the true end of the discourse. There is a peculiar pleasure with which hearers follow preachers who scale and conquer successive peaks in a chain of thought. It is equivalent to the joy of conquest with which we trace the victorious progress of a military campaign. We may illustrate this by a story. It is said that a young student for the ministry, whose father was one of the chaplains at the court of the Prince of Orange in the last century, was suddenly called upon to preach before the prince, who had heard marvelous stories of his skill. With scarcely any notice he was pushed into the pulpit, and in the presence of the courtly and noble audience announced as his text, the narrative of the eunuch who desired Philip to come up into the chariot and enlighten him as to the meaning of the scripture which he was reading.[1] The young preacher found, he said, four wonders in this passage, which he would make the four heads of his sermon. "Wonder the first, A courtier reads. Wonder the second,

[1] Acts 8 : 27–38.

A courtier reads the Bible. Wonder the third, A courtier owns himself ignorant of his subject. Wonder the fourth, A courtier applies to a minister of Christ for information, listens to his instruction, and follows his counsel." Here the sense of progress is a delight to almost any hearer—with the possible exception of the prince who provoked it. Robert Hall, who was a master of logical precision, from the words "Beloved, now are we the sons of God,"[1] deduces these three progressive points: I. The felicity of the future world is very imperfectly known ("It doth not yet appear," etc.). II. But the period is coming when it will be known ("When he shall appear"). III. The effect of this will be a perfect knowledge of Christ, and a conformity to him ("When he shall appear, we," etc.). And a preacher of our own time illustrates this same excellence of progress in thought when he divides the text, "While ye have the light, believe in the light; that ye may become sons of light"[2] into "Our Day, Our Duty, and Our Destiny."

4. Interesting, clear, and progressive divisions should also be symmetrical. There must be proportion in the various parts. Three rules will assist us here.

(1) Divisions should be related to one another in the progress of thought. If the sermon is to remain in the mind, whether of preacher or of

[1] 1 John 3 : 2.

[2] George Adam Smith, D. D., on John 12 : 36, Rev. Ver.

hearer, each division should be so formed as to suggest the one which follows. This will be insured if you have taken your thought from the text and followed the logical sequence of ideas. You will think the thought of the passage after it. Spurgeon preaching on the cure of the man sick of the palsy[1] divides his sermon happily until he reaches his last point: "I. Four men anxious about one. II. A man who went in through a roof and came out at the door. III. A man going in on a bed and coming out with the bed on him. IV. Somebody grumbled." The mind is so satisfied with the quaint arrangement of the three points, that there is a sense of surprise not wholly grateful when a fourth is added.

(2) Divisions should bear a due proportion the one to the other. Even the generous latitude of a camp-meeting rebels against the preacher who thus opened up a sermon on the sublime words, "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but the thunder of his power who can understand?"[2] "In discoursing upon this passage I shall, in the first place, review the chapter and show what is meant by the word 'these.' I shall, in the second place, mention some of the works of God. I shall, in the third place, conclude according to circumstances, light and liberty being given." It is hard to see from what quarter either light or liberty could come to such a preacher as this.

(3) Divisions should bear recapitulation. If at

[1] Mark 2 : 4. [2] Job 26 : 14.

the close of your sermon you cannot readily recall the divisions, and if they do not naturally succeed one another, you may be sure that they are faulty. It is not your memory that is to be blamed. That will do its work if furnished with the proper material. Adolphe Monod, who had all the Frenchman's clearness and compactness alike in his thought and his expression, has a sermon on "The tears of Paul,"[1] in which he draws a parallel between them and those which his Master shed. As you read his points you will see at once how easily they can be retained in the memory. "Paul shed tears of suffering and pain; tears of pastoral solicitude; tears of natural affection and friendship. Herein is the servant in holy parallelism with his Master; for three times it is recorded of Jesus that he wept: tears at Gethsemane, tears over Jerusalem, tears at the grave of Lazarus. Paul's ministry, like his Master's, was a ministry of tears."

One word in conclusion. In this important matter of divisions do not yield at once to passing fashions or transient fancies or groundless prejudice. The great masters of pulpit eloquence in our own century, and especially those who have revolutionized our methods of preaching—such men as F. W. Robertson, Alex. Maclaren, and C. H. Spurgeon, have with scarcely an exception used divisions, and even announced them in a formal manner. The disposition to make every-

[1] Acts 20 : 31.

thing subordinate to rhetoric will perhaps tempt you to resent a distinct and clearly announced partition of your subject. The temptation to indolence and insufficient preparation will possibly beguile you into making a talk and mistaking it—if your foolish mind be sufficiently darkened—for a sermon. The sermon is no more a display of rhetorical skill than it is a string of disconnected platitudes. In contrast with these, it should be a careful and intelligent exposition and enforcement of the passage which you have chosen for your text. If order be heaven's first law, then why shall not our sermons by the clearness and conclusiveness of their logical advance justify our claim to hold our credentials from the skies?

PARTS OF THE SERMON—Continued

SUMMARY

Special care to be bestowed on the Conclusion of the sermon.

I. Of What the Conclusion May Consist.

1. Of recapitulation.
2. Of application.
3. Of appeal.
4. Of rhetorical peroration.
5. Of Scripture.

II. Features Which Should Distinguish the Conclusion.

1. It should be personal to the hearer.
2. It should apply to the whole sermon.
3. It should not be too long.
4. It should be marked by variety.

Conclusion: How Long Should a Sermon Be.

1. Ancient custom.
2. Long sermons chiefly post-reformation.
3. The present disposition favors short sermons.
4. Considerations determining the length of the sermon: (1) The audience; (2) The theme; (3) The time of year; (4) The preacher; (5) The method of delivery.

Remember: (1) Short sermons are not necessarily brief; (2) The more study the shorter sermon; (3) Be independent in this matter; (4) Yet exercise common sense.

XII

PARTS OF THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

Of the various parts of the sermon the most pains should be given to the introduction and the conclusion; to the introduction because it is the first step that counts; to the conclusion because no two congregations being precisely alike in number or in condition of mind, the preacher will have no other opportunity with this audience. Of these two probably the conclusion is the more important. Therefore we should learn a lesson from Napoleon, and reserve the heaviest battalions for the close. "The only part of my speech that I prepare," said John Bright, "is the conclusion. I always know how and when I am going to stop."

The Conclusion

We will consider the various ways of treating this part of the sermon, and the features by which it should be marked.

I. Of what the conclusion may consist.

1. Recapitulation. This is especially necessary in an argumentative sermon when, as also in a case at law, you go over the various points already dealt with, and review the evidence which you have brought in substantiation of your thesis. In recapitulating, the danger is that you fall into

repetition. All that you should aim to do is to revive recollection. You are now in a position to survey the field, and it is not necessary that you should fight your battle all over again. Vary your language therefore; avoid the phrases which you have previously used; choose your words with great care; pack your sentences closely; and by compression gain cumulative force. "In your introduction," a homely Welsh preacher was wont to counsel young preachers, "show the people where you are going, and in your application remind them where you have been." So Phillips Brooks begins this part of one of his sermons with these words: "Thus, then, I have passed through the ground which I proposed. See where our thought has led us."[1]

2. Application. There was a time when this was a much more common conclusion than it is now, and often it did extraordinary execution.[2] But the inevitable danger which threatens any good practice followed. With monotonous iteration the preacher fell into the accustomed formula, and addressed his words first to the regenerated, then to the sinner. Human nature, whether in the one or in the other of these classes, craves variety. From Ennius, the Roman poet, comes the protest which is still needed: "A little moralizing is good, a little; I like a taste, but not a bath of it." Robertson, of Irvine, addressing a crowd of

[1] Sermon from John 17 : 3.

[2] Dr. W. M. Taylor, "The Scottish Pulpit," p. 108.

children in Glasgow, held their close attention by his stories until his conscience whispered that it was time to point his moral. He had scarcely said, "Now this teaches us——" when a little street arab in the front bench cried, "Never mind what it teaches. Gie's another story." "I learned," said he, "from that rascal to wrap the moral well in the heart of the story; not to put it as a sting into the tail. For stories are like pictures, and their lesson should be felt, but never obtruded." The same holds good as to the applications in a sermon. Always reserve them for the conclusion, and they are almost sure to become stale and pointless by frequent use, to be anticipated in the previous discussion of the subject, and to come when the hearer is forearmed because forewarned and on his guard, or else is too tired to feel the force of your remarks. Far wiser is the preacher who learns how to carry a thread of application through the entire sermon.[1]

And yet while this important element in the preacher's power should not be kept until the close of his discourse, it is equally unfortunate to let the sermon die out with no sort of application, thereby warranting the old whaler's comment upon his pastor's effort: "A nice sermon enough, but there was no harpoon in it." Daniel Webster protested against the same omission when he said, "When I attend upon the preaching of the gospel, I wish to have it made a Personal matter, a

[1] Dale, "Yale Lectures on Preaching," p. 146.

Personal matter, a Personal Matter." To borrow Sir Thomas Browne's quaint phrase, do not "conclude in a moist relentment." Do not fail, however, when you are thus bringing home to the hearts of your hearers the truths of the sermon, to distinguish earnestness from vehemence. Some intensely earnest and close applications are calm and sober. Nathan did not thunder his words of doom at guilty David;[1] a measured tone carried every syllable of Elijah's tremendous message home to the ears of Ahab,[2] and the voice which had cried so loudly in the wilderness of Judea sank into quieter but not less impressive tones when, in the dungeon of Machærus, John the Baptist reproved Herod for his crimes.[3] In this reserved force lies much of the power of Jonathan Edwards, "whose doctrine is all application, and his application all doctrine."[4]

3. Again, the conclusion may consist of appeal. I am inclined to think that the only faculty which should certainly be dealt with as the sermon draws to its close is the conscience. The final chance has now come to the preacher. Alas for him and for his hearers if he merit the crushing condemnation which Dr. J. Duncan, of Edinburgh, passed on an ineffective sermon: "The idea of the preacher is in the sentence after the last." Be on your guard against concluding with any vague generalities. Never resort to the treasury of

[1] 2 Sam. 12 : 7. [2] 1 Kings 17 : 1. [3] Luke 3 : 19, 20.
[4] Dr. John Duncan.

platitudes which has always been such a source of weakness to the pulpit. Let the final note be well defined, clear, pointed. John Wesley was not without warrant in his criticism of the preaching of Robert Hall, "You do not hear the voice which says, 'Thou art the man.'"[1]

4. As a fourth way of concluding a sermon, we mention the rhetorical peroration. Although it is the fashion at the present time to speak of this as though it were a weapon belonging to an extinct method of warfare, I am convinced that it may be used with great effect on certain occasions. There is no good evidence that it has had its day and ceased to be. The charm which lies in genuine oratory is not for an age but for all time. Study the perorations of Massillon[2] and the other great French preachers of the seventeenth century, of Robert Hall and Thomas Chalmers, of J. M. Mason, of Henry Melvill, and James Parsons, of York,[3] of Morley Punshon, and Dr. John Caird. Without any ambitious or artificial straining after effect, the peroration should be based on the whole of the sermon, and its impressive, earnest, and cumulative thought may naturally find expression in language more ornate and rhetorical than that which has been previously used.

A most effective conclusion can often be built up from the Bible itself. Here the preacher has

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[1] See 2 Cor. 5 : 20, for a model conclusion.

[2] *E. g.*, "Funeral Oration for Louis XIV."

[3] "Public Speaking and Debate," by G. J. Holyoake, p. 193.

the advantage of language which comes home to the heart with the music of a familiar and dearly loved strain, and to the conscience with the authority of God himself.[1] And we may add that whatever has been the nature of his conclusion, he will do well, oftener than not, to close with the words of his text. Make sure that this shall remain as the final impression. How happily Spurgeon illustrates this in one of his early sermons, from the text, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."[2] "Ye timid ones, do not be afraid to approach, for 'tis no vain thing to remember that timidity buried Christ. Faith would not have given him a funeral at all. Fear buried him. Nicodemus, the night disciple, and Joseph of Arimathea, secretly, for fear of the Jews, went and buried him. Therefore, ye timid ones, ye may go too. Ready-to-halt, poor Fearing, and thou, Mrs. Despondency and Much-afraid, go often there; let it be your favorite haunt, there build a tabernacle, there abide. And often say to your heart when you are in distress and sorrow, 'Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'"

II. What are the chief features which should be found in the conclusion.

1. I answer, first, that the conclusion should be personal to the hearer. It would seem as if while he is speaking the center of interest on the part of the preacher shifts. At first, as is most nat-

[1] For examples, see the "Sermons of William Jay."

[2] Matt. 28 : 6.

ural, he deals chiefly with his subject. He is perhaps in closer touch with that than he is with his congregation. But as his discourse proceeds he finds himself increasingly drawn to them. His grasp of his weapon is now so secure that he can watch its effect. And when the last ten minutes are reached he has come to close quarters and is looking his hearers full in the face. Any sense of distance is fatal here. You cannot land in mid-ocean. Festus is not on the judgment seat when he cries, "Paul, thou art beside thyself," or Agrippa when he sneers, "with but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." These men for the moment feel the touch of him who with no sense of distance lays his fettered hand on their hearts, and concludes, "I would to God that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds."[1]

2. As a second feature, the conclusion should apply to the whole sermon. Take care that it is not simply a conclusion of some one part or head of the discourse. Before beginning to compose it, accustom yourself to pause in the preparation of your sermon, and carefully read over what has been already written. Glance through the plan, and see that the conclusion is in line with the entire subject, from the introduction forward.

3. The conclusion should not be too long. Beware of what lawyers call "overlaying a case,"[2]

[1] Acts 26 : 29, Rev. Ver. [2] Harris, "On Advocacy," p. 159.

and remember the important distinction of Robert Hall, "It is one thing to stop; another to finish." You can stop; but if the sermon be worthy of the name it cannot be finished. The old Puritans were wont to say—although in this matter they preached better than they practised—that it was wiser to send the people away longing than loathing; and Hesiod's famous dictum, "the half is more than the whole," has, I think, an unintended bearing on our present point. Learn to leave well alone, and to cease firing when your ammunition is gone. Congregations know blank cartridges, and they are not afraid of them. As you value your reputation for truthfulness and fair play do not announce that you mean to conclude and then fail to keep your promise. Do not say, "Finally . . . In conclusion . . . One word more . . . And now before we part——." This is to recall Pope's ode, only in no seraphic mood,

> Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying;
> Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying!

Why should your sermon be like Charles II., "such an unconscionable time in dying"? The consummation devoutly to be wished can best be reached by having one clearly defined conclusion and no more. Your hearers will soon come to recognize when this is reached, and they are not unreasonable if they resent another turn in the wilderness when Canaan has been brought so near. A French preacher takes his seat for the

moment with a congregation tortured by false hopes and illusive promises; and thus he pictures their feelings: "And now there are signs of the end. On the horizon we see the gray dawn of something that might be an application or conclusion. Alas! we are wrong. The end is not yet. There is another and another. The unhappy man is searching for a good closing sentence, and cannot find one." Notwithstanding what has been said as to care in the preparation of this part of the sermon, we should add that there is no part which the preacher will, if he be master of himself, of his subject, and of his audience, hold more loosely. In the course of your conclusion, are you strongly impressed with the conviction that the moment has come for you to stop? Then stop. As Luther puts it: "When thou seest thy hearers most attentive, then conclude, for so they will come again more cheerfully the next time."

4. As a fourth feature, the conclusion should be marked by variety. Let the character of your sermon decide the character of your conclusion. In practical sermons, deal more largely with motives; in historical sermons, draw effective lessons; in sermons which are largely argumentative, sum up conclusions. Plainly, there can be no one uniform rule as to this. The schools of rhetoric formerly decreed that the conclusion should be divided into inferences, applications, and lessons. When the preacher said, "From this consideration of our subject, we infer——" the congregation knew that the

moon of his conclusion was in her first quarter. Our freer modes of treatment have rebelled against this prescribed allotment of the parting words, and now it is rather by our increasing directness and earnestness that our hearers perceive that this stage has been reached. As a general thing the preacher does well to let it be known, even in so many words, if necessary, that he is about to conclude his discourse. And we counsel also that it is wise occasionally to break the tyranny of custom by concluding in a novel way. What you are in the habit of doing, refrain from doing. Instead of an appeal, put a question. Leave the application to the hearer's conscience. A sudden silence, broken only by a few parting words of prayer, may arrest attention where a train of reflections would fail to gain a hearing. Perhaps Paul's departing from Athens stimulated inquiry. It was when the Jews sought Jesus at the feast and found him not that multitudes began discussing who and what he was.[1]

The question is sometimes asked, How long should a sermon be? The answer has varied with the centuries. The Latin Fathers usually occupied half an hour, although often they limited themselves to ten minutes. The Greek Fathers, as we might expect from a comparison of the languages in which the sermons were preached, were longer. The fashion for long sermons came in after the Reformation. Charles II. was willing to

[1] John 7 : 12.

listen to Baxter for two hours. The delivery of one of his massive sermons occupied Charnock not less than three hours and a half. At the planting of the First Church, Woburn, Mass., the discourse lasted four or five hours; this seeming to be the point beyond which taking any accurate account of time was futile. The present disposition is to demand short sermons. At a bookseller's shop in London John Henry Newman saw sermons labeled: "Warranted orthodox, not preached before, and—20 minutes." "Twenty minutes with a leaning to mercy" was the pithy way in which an English judge answered our question. Even Mr. Spurgeon considered forty minutes sufficient for a discourse, and he himself rarely exceeded that time. Abbé Mullois says. "The harangues of Napoleon only lasted a few minutes, yet they electrified whole armies. In fifteen weeks, with a sermon of seven minutes every Sunday, one might give a complete course of religious instruction if the sermons were well digested beforehand." So short a time as ten minutes would not suffice for the preacher who had not to harangue, as did Napoleon, nor simply to exhort or declaim, as is the practice of many Romish preachers; but rather to explain, instruct, and apply. A true sermon cannot be limited as a brief, impassioned harangue can.

The length of the sermon must depend upon the character of the subject to be discussed, upon what measure the congregation has been accustomed to,

upon the preacher himself, and even upon such minor considerations as the seasons of year or the time of the day in which it is delivered. It may also be added that a sermon which is extemporaneous can be at least five minutes longer than a sermon which is read from a manuscript. But in any case, as Luther says, "Know when to stop." Leave something for next time. Exhaust neither your theme nor your audience. Close at a point short of that reached by the Spanish proverb: "We have still to skin the tail." Yet I would have the young preacher who cultivates brevity reflect that short sermons are not necessarily lively. One can be very dull in a quarter of an hour. An English bishop after hearing one of his clergy preach, remarked: "Your sermon was very short, sir." "Yes, my lord, I thought it better to be brief than tedious." "Oh, but you were tedious." As a rule the more study you put into your sermon the shorter, because the more compact will it be. What Pascal wittily says of one of his "Provincial Letters" holds true here also: "I would have made it shorter if I could have kept it longer." You will soon find yourself preaching for about the same time every Sunday without needing to refer to your watch, and if on any occasion you exceed it, you may be assured of hearing of that sermon before long from some time-serving member of your congregation.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON

SUMMARY

The sermon a work of art. As a composition, should have in it Statement, Argument, Illustration. Before dealing with these we consider the Literary and Oratorical qualities in the sermon.

I. The Literary Quality in the Sermon.

1. Estimate at its true value the literary form of the discourse: (1) Thus the preacher's message reaches the congregation; (2) Literary superiority attracts and holds hearers; (3) The style cannot be separated from the thought; (4) There is a moral element in style; (5) Advantages of having to speak in English.
2. Write carefully: (1) Take time; (2) Habitually write your best.
3. Write constantly.
4. Aim at freshness and finish: (1) At freshness: (*a*) Use the language of daily life; (*b*) Acquire a rich and varied style; (*c*) Study the style of other preachers; (*d*) Note your own style carefully; (2) At finish: (*a*) Take time in selecting the right word; (*b*) But do not elaborate over much.

Note. As to quotations.

II. The Oratorical Quality in the Sermon.

1. The advantages of the quality.
2. How it comes: (1) Is the result of possessing the oratorical instinct; (2) But can be strengthened.
3. How it shows itself: (1) In the choice of words; (2) In the arrangement of sentences; (3) In the impression made by the whole sermon: (*a*) Keep it true in its proportion; (*b*) Expand when expansion is needed; (*c*) Let the principal thought remain prominent.

XIII

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON

As much as a building or a picture the sermon may be regarded as a work of art. It is put together according to a definite plan, and with a distinct purpose. Therefore we speak of it as a composition, for whether in art or literature "by composition is meant the distribution and orderly placing of things, both in general and particular."[1] Ruskin's broad statement holds good in the making of the sermon as well as in the making of the picture: "Composition may be best defined as the help of everything in the picture by everything else."[2] So that when we speak of the sermon as a composition we have in mind the several parts of which it is made up, so harmoniously arranged and subordinated to the whole as to produce the true effect.

Literary and Oratorical

As a composition the sermon should have in it an element of statement, which may be largely exegetical, an element of argument, and an element of illustration. Proving, painting, and persuading, were "the three P's" in Thomas Guthrie's homiletics. The successful employment of these elements

[1] Dryden. [2] "Modern Painters," Vol. V., p. 165.

will depend in part on the preacher's sermon style, on its general quality as suitable to literary composition, and on its special quality as suitable to a composition intended to be spoken. In this chapter we propose to deal with this subject and consider the literary and oratorical elements in the sermon.

I. The literary quality in the sermon needs to be considered first.

Dean Swift in his sarcastic description of the shallow freethinkers of his day sneers at "that quality of their voluminous writings which the poverty of the English language compels me to call their style." It would be well had the Dean's gibe applied to freethinkers only. But it does not.

1. As our first point, therefore, we would counsel the preacher to estimate at its true value the literary form of his discourse.

(1) It is important because it is the form in which the preacher's message gets to his congregation.

(2) Beyond question literary superiority attracts and holds hearers. Unconsciously to themselves audiences are critical of language. A congregation of peasants in a country chapel in England sat in judgment upon a certain preacher because "he used half-crown words when sixpenny ones would have served." [1]

(3) Moreover, we can no more consider the style of the sermon apart from its thought, than we can

[1] "Memoir of Dr. R. W. McAll," p. 146.

consider the pith of the tree apart from its wood. Style is closely connected with thought. To write well is, as Renan says, to think well. There is no art of style distinct from the culture of the mind. Good training of the mind is the only school of good style; wanting that, you have merely rhetoric and bad taste. We have not yet outgrown Blair's maxim, "Embarrassed, obscure, and feeble sentiments are generally if not always the result of embarrassed, obscure, and feeble thought."

(4) May we not even go further than this, and assert that to a certain extent the style of the sermon is a reflection of the character of the preacher? "Look in thy heart, and write," said Sir Philip Sydney. Gibbon held that "the style of the author should be the image of his mind"; and Emerson touched the same truth when he gave it as his opinion that "style is the revelation of the inner self."

(5) It is inspiring for us to reflect that the preacher who uses English as his speech possesses a very noble medium of communication. More and more as the years pass, for us to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech will be to launch out upon "the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven."[1] Perhaps it is necessary also to remind the young preacher that with an increase of culture our hearers become more exacting in this matter of the use of good English by their ministers. Neither in nor out of the pul-

[1] Emerson, "Society and Solitude."

pit should language either slipshod or slang be tolerated. The preacher should in this, as in other and higher matters, be an example to the flock. "Everybody writes so well now," Tennyson once said half-complainingly; and the day is coming, let us hope, when everybody will speak so well as to demand from the ministry "sound speech that cannot be condemned."

We counsel the preacher to read constantly in the writings of the best masters of pure, sinewy, and melodious English. The works of De Quincey, Macaulay, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Cardinal Newman, J. A. Froude, and John Ruskin, will furnish good models, and the most varied taste should find pleasure as well as profit in the masterpieces of one or more of these great writers.

2. As a second point, we urge on the preacher to write carefully. Let it be granted at once that continuous sermon writing is not easy. George William Curtis said that seeing it took him three months to prepare a lecture, how a clergyman could prepare two sermons a week fit to deliver before an audience, he could not understand; John Bright was wont to say the same thing. Undoubtedly the labor of conscientious literary work in any department is more severe than those who are strangers to it suppose. "A distress," says John Henry Newman, "sometimes so keen and so specific that it resembles nothing else than bodily pain, is the token of the wear and tear of the mind." The fact that the preacher deals so

largely with the emotions adds to this burden in composition. Such considerations as these must be kept in mind in order to make us faithful in our pulpit preparation.

(1) By all means take time over your sermons. "It is an awful thing to write against Time, and Time always is even with us in the end, and he never lets what is written against him last very long or go very far.[1] Begin to prepare your sermon early in the week. Thomas Spencer, a young English preacher of rare promise, was accidentally drowned on Monday morning, but the outlines of the sermons for the next Sunday were found in his pocket. "To secure thought and preparation," counsels Bishop Wilberforce, "begin, whenever it is possible, the next Sunday's sermon at least on the preceding Monday. Do not listen to the pleading of indolence or let the bidding of a fastidious spirit wait for the afflatus which is held by many to constitute the whole peculiarity of genius." To his students Dr. Chalmers said: "I would have you all sit down doggedly; for if you once bethink yourselves of waiting for the afflatus, the risk is that the afflatus never may come."[2]

(2) And we may add as another counsel: Accustom yourself to write your best on all occasions. Charles Lamb, the essayist, used to say that his most careful writings were in the ledgers of the East India Company whose clerk for all his

[1] J. R. Lowell.

[2] Hanna, "Life of Chalmers," Vol. II., Chap. I.

active life he was, and Anthony Trollope, the novelist, who was employed in the General Post Office, London, speaks of the infinite pains which he took with the reports that he prepared for his employers. These are illustrations of the wise words of a conscientious American writer: "He who does not write as well as he can on every occasion, will soon form the habit of not writing well at all." [1]

3. Our third point naturally follows. Write constantly. Without insisting upon any hard and fast rule which should be binding on all preachers, it is certainly fair to say that he who cannot write in full one sermon every week has mistaken his vocation. If your method is to preach without manuscript, all the more necessary is it that you write.[2] The habit of writing as a means of mental culture was one characteristic of Jonathan Edwards as a preacher which he retained through life.[3] Robert Hall lays down as "a rule admitting of no exception, that a man will speak well in proportion as he has written much." His own practice would suggest that we substitute for the word "written" the word "composed." It may be possible to train ourselves as he did, to put long trains of thought into words without writing a line. But this is not common, nor is it a practice to be desired. The secret of good talking is to talk with the pen.

[1] George Ripley. [2] W. M. Taylor, "Scottish Pulpit," p. 183.
[3] Allen's "Life of Edwards," p. 4.

4. Finally, aim at freshness and finish in your composition.

(1) At freshness. To this end use the language of daily life. "Our preaching is much addicted to a few words; it holds on to phrases when lapse of time has changed their meaning."[1] Avoid this by cultivating a more copious vocabulary. Preaching is conversation raised to its highest power. Those who heard Mr. Spurgeon heard the finest illustration of his own opinion that "the perfection of preaching is to talk." When Thomas Guthrie found this out he abandoned the traditional pulpit phraseology, spoke as he would on a platform or in a parlor, and compelled the reluctant English critic to declare that he was the foremost preacher of his generation.[2] One of the most original of preachers, Robertson, of Irvine, changed his style on the advice of a lady of his congregation, who told him that his manner of speaking in the pulpit savored too much of the schools. "In conversation you are most natural and powerful. Bring your conversational manner of thinking and speaking into the pulpit. Adopt it there, and your discourse will be most effective."

Endeavor to acquire a style which will be rich and varied. Terence resolved to make it a principal rule of life not to be too much addicted to one thing, and in our composition the same rule is useful. Cultivate what Sydney Smith terms "multifariousness of style."

[1] Emerson. [2] The London "Times," newspaper.

Avoid those conventional platitudes which lie in wait for every preacher, and are sure to betray him who does not carefully weigh his words. Demolish a commonplace with a happily chosen phrase.[1] Not *a* word suitable to your thought, but *the* word is what you are after. The sermons of other preachers may with profit be studied in this matter of style, and especially the sermons of the preachers of the present time. The day for what were formerly called "great sermons" is not now. "We don't preach now-a-days," said Phillips Brooks, "as they used to do when a man was known by some great sermon, like Robert Hall's on 'Modern Infidelity.'" Our style is bound to adjust itself to the age.

Note carefully your own style as you adventure with it on the sea of experience. It is like a boat which you must learn to know and to handle. "This word," you say to yourself as you look back when the sermon has been delivered, "told." Ask yourself why it told. "That word failed. Why?" Endeavor to have a style of your own. Think your thoughts clear through, clothing them in the words which fit them the best. This will give you what is called "distinction" of style. Your words will now be not yours so much as you.[2]

(2) Aim at finish. Beginning your work of preparation early in the week, you will be able to take time in selecting the right word. One popu-

[1] A. S. Hill, "Our English," pp. 154, 155.
[2] "John Foster's Life," p. 117.

lar novelist of the present day will wait an hour if necessary for his word. Shelley sooner than use an inferior word left a blank in his lines when the right word did not occur to him. To express accurately the shimmer of the long grass or the shade of green under the breaking wave another poet would pause and watch and think for weeks together. Although we shall not be able to do this, yet it is well for us to lay to heart what John Morley says: "It is not everybody who can command the mighty rhythm of the greatest master of human speech. But every one can make reasonably sure that he knows what he means, and whether he has found the right word." Cardinal Newman, treating of this subject, says: "My one and single desire has been to do what is so difficult, namely, to express clearly and exactly my meaning." No man in the Victorian era better succeeded in doing this than did Newman.

And yet there may be some preachers who need to be cautioned against elaborating over much. The exigencies of the pulpit make this failing rare. The "Give, Give," which sounds in our ear its demand for the two sermons every week, hushes the whisperings of a fastidious taste. It may be some consolation to us who would readily bestow more time on polishing our sermon if only the time were to be had, to reflect that after all constant and careful writing is sure to give to our style all the finish that is necessary. An extreme fastidiousness often caused Dr. F. J. A. Hort to

sit hour after hour in the spell of a sort of aphasia which robbed him for the time of all power of expression. But assuredly "a sermon, like a tool, may be polished till it has no edge."[1] The preacher's style may become featureless through excess of finish; and with Andrea del Sarto we may sigh:

> All is silver gray,
> Placid and perfect with my art; the worse!

Better listen to Spurgeon's homely warning to his students against sermons which are prepared till there is no living zeal possible in connection with them, "Brethren, you will never grow anything out of boiled potatoes." Conscious that his own style was in danger of becoming too measured, he was in the habit of reading Carlyle in order to gain rugged and abrupt forms of speech.

At this point it may be well to put into a few sentences what needs to be said as to the habit of quoting from others. Do not, then, be afraid to quote when to do so is effective. "He that never quotes will never be quoted."[2] Never quote in any other language than the vernacular. Beware of quoting overmuch, and so reducing your sermon to a mosaic, brilliant only with stones from various and strange mines. There are preachers who recall the inelegant criticism which Byron passed on Hazlitt, that "his style suffered from a cutaneous eruption." Trite and commonplace quotations

[1] Job Orton. [2] Spurgeon.

should certainly be avoided. In making prose quotations it seems not to be necessary to acknowledge your indebtedness to another when the words are familiar; and where you do refer to the author it is wise to do it in the briefest manner. Attention must not be diverted from the main subject of the discourse. If you are not gifted with a good verbal memory it may be best to clothe the thought in your own words, and in this case a general acknowledgment of indebtedness will suffice. As to quotations from poetry, the fewer the better. Beware of hackneyed lines and couplets from the hymn book. To conclude a sermon with poetry is open to the objection that it gives to the discourse an air of self-consciousness and artfulness. Occasionally it may be done with great effect, but the practice of rounding off a discourse with a line of poetry is to be deprecated. Prose is after all the natural language for earnest address; and the sermon should be never so much a sermon as in its closing words. I need scarcely say that in making poetical quotations it is not necessary to acknowledge that you are indebted for them to another. If the poetry is poor it should not be quoted at all. If it is good you can trust the congregation not to credit you with a gift which you do not possess.

II. We proceed to speak in the next place of the oratorical quality in the sermon.

1. We inquire first, what are the advantages of this quality? I answer, it is this gift of oratory

by which in a very large measure the preacher commands the emotion of his hearers. "The object of the speaker," it has been said, and the distinction is a true one, "is to give information; the object of the orator is to incite to action. The speaker illumines the understanding; the orator impels and directs the passions. The speaker is a guide; the orator is a master. Speech is light; the oration is force."[1] Times in the history of preaching when it has been the fashion to sneer at this great power have been times of pulpit decay. "We have no sermons that are addressed to the passions that are good for anything," complained Dr. Johnson in the dreary years of the last century. For this reason he hesitated to say what sermons afforded the best specimens of pulpit eloquence. In accounting for the remarkable power of Mr. Spurgeon it has perhaps not been sufficiently considered that his sermons, while not critical or in any great extent exegetical, are all evolved from the heart. They come from the emotions and go to the emotions. Truth was scarcely truth to him until it had been through the fires of his own experience. "The heart," as Augustine said, "makes the theologian."

2. We ask, again, how does this quality come?

(1) In the first instance, no doubt, the oratorical quality in the sermon is the result of the oratorical instinct in the preacher. Eloquence, unlike rhetoric, is inborn, and he who has it not as a

[1] George Jacob Holyoake.

native possession will never be able to acquire it. John Foster was gifted with the highest literary skill, but he was entirely wanting in oratorical power. We read his essays with all the delight which is kindled by a delicate and critical choice of language, and a felicity of diction perhaps unsurpassed in English writers; but listen to him when he speaks, and you agree with Robert Hall: "Though his words might be fire within, the moment they left his lips they froze and fell down at his feet." The sermon which sounds well when read is not always, nor indeed often, the sermon which does the most execution when it is spoken. "Does it read well?" Charles James Fox inquired about a speech which had been delivered in the British House of Commons. "Yes, grandly." "Then it was not a good speech."

(2) And yet he who possesses in any degree this gift of natural oratory can strengthen and improve it by cultivation and practice. He who is accustomed to speak frequently learns in time how best to make his points, and how to arrange and discharge his material. Especially does this skill show itself when he is making the transition from one division of his sermon to another. The most difficult art to one who is beginning to speak in public, becomes at length so easy and natural to him that it is with a sense of triumph that he approaches the point where his transition occurs. He sees the bridge by which the gulf can be crossed, and he treads it with conscious mastery.

3. How then, it may be asked, does the oratorical quality in a sermon show itself?

(1) In the choice of words. Those which are used will be resonant in utterance. They will carry farthest, and make the readiest and strongest impression on the hearer. They will be nervous and yet unaffected, and above all they will be the words best suited to his purpose. "Understanding language and the positive degree," so runs Emerson's comment on the oratory of Daniel Webster, "all his words tell. What is small he shows as simple, and makes the great great." Words which are chiefly remarkable for their length, words which do not readily reveal their meaning, words which are superfine or affected are to be rejected. "Particularly," says Dr. Joseph Parker, "strike out all such words as 'methinks I see,' 'cherubim and seraphim,' 'the glinting stars,' 'the stellar heavens,' 'the circumambient air,' 'the rustling wings,' 'the pearly gates,' 'the glistening dew,' 'the meandering rills,' and 'the crystal battlements of heaven.' I know how pretty they look to the young eye, and how sweetly they sound in the young ear; but let them go without a sigh." This is not to condemn vivid and dramatic words. By all means train yourself in the use of them. When not exaggerated, they are most effective. The selfishness of the unprincipled labor agitator was exposed at a touch when Henry Ward Beecher declared that "for himself he had no sympathy for an eight-hour man with a fourteen-hour wife."

Our own petitions rose in condemnation of our practice when he also said that many of us "prayed cream and lived skim-milk."

(2) This oratorical quality in the discourse shows itself in the arrangement of the sentences, and of the various parts of the sermon. The climax is the result of three things: of thought, which in the sermon grows from more to more; of rhetoric which helps the sermon to rise to loftier heights of expression at the points where it can produce the best effect; of delivery, which swells in form and intensifies in fervor as each coign of vantage in argument and appeal is gained.[1]

(3) The oratorical quality can be traced in the impression which the whole sermon makes on the minds of the hearers.

In each part of the sermon let the proper proportion be observed. Do not be so prolix in the earlier stages that you leave yourself no time to complete the discourse symmetrically. Many a sermon lacks the topstone because so much time has been spent on the foundations. In architecture, the base of the column is designedly made plain, because the capital which is its crowning glory is richly carved.

Expand in your composition when expansion seems to be needed. A leading lawyer gave it as his opinion in talking upon this subject with C. G. Finney, that preachers are needlessly afraid of repetition. Words, phrases, even whole sentences

[1] A. S. Hill, "Principles of Rhetoric," p. 192.

may be repeated when to do so makes the meaning plainer, and the sermon more effective. The repetition of embarrassed exhaustion is one thing, the repetition of rhetorical enforcement is quite another. What our congregations resent is not the second of these. "Bulk," as Whately pithily says, "is necessary to digestion. Most men are like horses, they need straw to their oats." What has been said as to the writer is even more true as to the speaker: "An author who finds himself obliged to choose between repetition and obscurity, ought not to doubt as to his choice." Of one of her characters George Eliot observes, "It was a defensive measure of Sir Hugo Mallinger's to mingle purposeless remarks with the expression of serious feeling." No doubt there has been far too much of this done in the pulpit. In urging that in common with other speakers the preacher cultivate the art of expanding his thought in words, I shall not be understood to plead for the platitudes for which the pulpit has been not without reason condemned. Very different is the repetition and expansion of the true orator. Listen to Lacordaire as he dwells on our Lord's Commission to his apostles, and see how one simple sentence can be clothed with splendor: "'Go teach all nations.' Fear neither the difficulties of foreign tongues, nor the differences of manners, nor the power of secular governments. Consult not the course of rivers nor the direction of mountain ranges; go straight on. Go as the thunder of him who sent

you, as the creative word went, which carried life into chaos, as the eagles go, and the angels." This is rhetoric indeed, the rhetoric of a spoken style, but it is rhetoric directed only to the apprehension and enforcement of the very truth which found its simplest expression in the few pregnant words, "Go teach all nations."

So, as our final counsel here, we say, See to it that when the sermon is completed the principal thought stands out clearly before the mind of your hearer. Lyman Beecher was wont to assert that a sermon should have one, and but one, "burning point." The power of Chalmers lay here. He held that one point up to his congregation, as a lapidary holds up the diamond, until every facet of it caught the light. That our hearers should be able to travel all the lines of statement, argument, and illustration by which the burning point has been reached is not necessary. Enough if the impression remain. The truth embodied in the theme is the truth finally impressed on the mind, enshrined in the heart, enthroned in the conscience.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

I. What is Pulpit Exegesis?

Etymology of the word. Concerned, in the first instance, with verbal analysis. Distinct from exposition; but essential to it.

II. What does Pulpit Exegesis Require?

1. A written revelation.
2. An intelligent interpretation of Scripture; (1) Spiritual qualities needed: (*a*) Faith; (*b*) Reverence; (*c*) Unction. (2) Intellectual qualities needed. A. The homiletical instinct. B. Scholarly tastes and habits; Seen: (*a*) In accurate treatment of the text; (*b*) In vigorous treatment of the theme. C. Logical acuteness. D. Sound judgment.

Counsels.

III. The Advantages of Exegesis in the Sermon.

1. It tends to hold the preacher down to his office.
2. It is in keeping with the philosophic method of research.
3. It carries with it a sense of authority. (1) Its influence on the preacher; (2) Its influence on the congregation.

XIV

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

THE intellectual foundations of the sermon should be laid in statement. When the sermon rises in the main from the text, it is natural that this element of statement should be largely exegetical. In this chapter we propose to consider pulpit exegesis, and to ask what it is, what it requires on the part of the preacher, and how an intelligent use of it will be of benefit both to him and to his congregation.

Exegesis

I. What then is pulpit exegesis?

The etymology of the word suggests that it means the bringing out into the light of clear understanding of an idea which is shut up in language. In the first instance it concerns itself with verbal analysis; but because words in the Bible stand to represent thought it inevitably deals with the truths of which the words are only the expression. Although exegesis will often result in exposition, it yet remains distinct from it, in that it keeps closer to the interpretation of words; but great harm has been done by expository sermons which have been prepared in willful or unconscious ignorance of exegesis. Pulpit exegesis consists in

gathering up the results of the grammatical interpretation of the Scriptures, and incorporating them in the sermon.[1] The word "came," in Matt. 20 : 28 ("Even as the Son of man came," etc.), suggests to Dr. Maclaren a theme, "Christ's teaching about his birth"; and furnishes him with an introduction in which he refers to some other occasions in which our Lord spoke of himself as coming, and then opens up the three main thoughts of the sermon itself.

II. What does pulpit exegesis require?

1. Plainly, first of all, a written revelation. There can be no interpretation of thought until it has first found expression in some permanent outward form.[2] For this reason every return to the thought of Scripture has been attended by a revival of exegesis. Erasmus, by publishing his edition of the New Testament; Melanchthon, by his commentary on Romans; Colet, by lecturing on the Epistles of Paul in Oxford, and on the Lord's Prayer in London, helped to lay the foundations for Protestant exegesis. At the heart of the Reformation of the sixteenth century burned this impelling passion for an intelligent apprehension of what the words of the Bible meant. "When I was a monk," says Luther, "I allegorized everything; but now I have given up allegorizing, and my first and best art is to explain the Scriptures

[1] Professor Briggs, "Biblical Study," Chap. II.

[2] Dr. Thos. Arnold, "Essay on the Interpretation of Scripture." "Sermons," Vol. II.

according to the proper sense; for it is in the literal sense that power, doctrine, and art reside."

2. Pulpit exegesis also requires an intelligent interpretation of the written revelation. The call to the Christian ministry carries with it the promise of divine aid in interpreting the word of God,[1] but this in no arbitrary or miraculous way. We will glance, therefore, at some of the qualities which will aid the preacher who aims to excel in exegesis. These qualities are spiritual and intellectual.

(1) What spiritual qualities will he need?

(*a*) First, Faith. The delight in verbal analysis which the preacher feels should be chiefly due to his conviction that now he is penetrating into the true meaning of God's word. He is thinking the thoughts of God after him. So Luther expressed a truth which all church history corroborates when he declared his conviction that "if ever the Bible is to be given to the world, it must be by those who are Christians, and have the mind of Christ."

(*b*) A second spiritual quality will be Reverence. This will not only carry the preacher into the heart of words that are rich in divine truth, so that what to others is only a barren bush to him will burn with the presence of God, but it will also temper his pleasure in expounding the Bible with a devout respect for its authorship, origin, and purpose.

If we have real reverence for Scripture and a firm belief in that which it declares, we shall never strain a single one of its words or phrases, or strain a single fact to make it fit

[1] 1 Cor. 4 : 1, 2, 2 Cor. 2 : 17; 2 Tim. 2 : 1, 2.

them. Abstinence from such dishonesty will assuredly bring its reward in clearer apprehension of the whole record hereafter.[1]

(*c*) A third and very important spiritual quality is Unction. We are often surprised by the insight of some simple-minded and illiterate student of the Bible, who will, with no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, bring out the precise meaning hidden in a Scripture word or phrase. But was not this what Christ promised to his disciples?[2] Did not his apostles witness that it was in them? The things of the Spirit of God must be spiritually discerned. "For the giving of Scripture, and the receiving of Scripture, we need the living action of the living Spirit of God." It is by the anointing from the Holy One that we know all things. Coleridge said truly, "The Bible without the Spirit is a sundial by moonlight." Richard Baxter studied his text on his knees, with his finger on the passage from which he proposed to preach, and on his lips the prayer, "Lord, reveal even this to me! show me thy meaning!"

(2) Scarcely less necessary to correct and profitable exegesis are certain intellectual qualities.

A. First of these must be mentioned the homiletical instinct, by means of which a preacher seizes almost at once on the material best adapted to his purpose, and throws it into the form fittest for use in the sermon. Distinct from other serviceable qual-

[1] F. D. Maurice, "Faith and Action," p. 215.

[2] Matt. 11 : 25 ; 1 Cor. 2 : 14 ; 1 John 2 : 20.

ities in the preacher, this seems to be indispensable if the sermon is to be a sermon indeed. A man may be a theologian, he may have careful training in philosophy, he may even possess a distinct literary quality of his own, and yet lacking the homiletical instinct he may fail in the pulpit. "Take Alford's or Meyer's 'Notes on the New Testament.' Read them aloud. No congregation in this world, except one composed of theological students, would listen to them for five minutes."[1]

B. Further, to excel in exegesis the preacher should have scholarly tastes and habits. These will show themselves in two ways.

(*a*) First, in accurate treatment of the text. Study carefully its construction, attend to the weight and force of particles. Compare passages in which the same words or phrases occur elsewhere than in your text. Often a whole sermon will lie in a word. A living preacher illustrated this when he took for his theme, "Comfort in the tenses of a verb," and for his text, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver."[2] How suggestive for the purposes of a sermon is a study of Paul's use of antithesis in another passage (1 Cor. 1 : 22–24). Follow the two parallel lines in this passage, the one indicated by the words, "a sign," "a stumbling-block," "the power of God"; the other by the words, "wisdom," "foolishness," "the wisdom of God," and you have the natural divisions

[1] Hugh Stowell Brown. [2] 2 Cor. 1 : 10.

for a sermon on Christ crucified, in which the human side of the cross may be contrasted with the divine.

(*b*) The scholarly habit will also show itself in vivid and vigorous treatment of the theme. Take time for questions of interest which are suggested by your subject. Bring into the discussion the literature of the text, its history, its critical treatment, and the science, archæology, and natural history connected with it.

C. A third quality of great importance is logical acuteness. This is essential to skill in analysis and synthesis. It is the faculty which perceives and seizes upon distinctions, resemblances, and connections in thought. Tholuck admired especially this power in Jonathan Edwards, and when a Transatlantic visitor inquired of him what he regarded as the characteristic of the American mind, he replied "*Scharfsicht*" (sharpsightedness), "the power of distinction and the power of analysis."[1]

D. To the qualities already enumerated another must be added, namely, sound judgment. You need to know just how far to carry your analysis, and just where to stop. Let me counsel the young preacher enamored of his exegetical skill to see to it that he does not let his exegesis concern itself only with words. Be not one of those

> Learned philologers who chase
> A panting syllable through time and space.

[1] "Life of Dr. Ed. Kirk," p. 203.

Avoid mere grammatical hair-splitting, and striving about words to no profit. "Learning rightly employed seasons like salt; but if all be salt, what remains to season?" Canon Liddon significantly says, "The world was saved by the substance of the message from heaven and not by the words that conveyed it"; and Matthew Arnold put a note of warning into an epigram when he criticized the revisers of the Authorized version of the New Testament as seeming to think that "man was made for the aorist, and not the aorist for man." The undue emphasis on words which leads one preacher to declare that he who understands grammar so as to truly interpret the language of God is to his mind the theologian of the day,[1] is the better for being modified by another who reminds us that "we are often impoverished in a religious sense by our grammatical cleverness. God is not a God of etymology and syntax, else salvation would be of grammar, not of grace."[2]

And in your exegesis recognize the full scope of Scripture. In a recent trial a lawyer of great eminence, who had the conduct of one side, when he came to reply surprised his junior by the resolution not to encumber the presentation of the case in its largest sense by introducing all its trumpery details. "I am going," said he, "to deal with it in a much larger sense." The result showed that he was right. Minute criticism is apt to err. Losing sight of this "larger sense," it narrows and belit-

[1] C. H. Spurgeon. [2] Dr. J. Parker.

tles the theology of the pulpit and gives occasion to Emerson to declare that "analysis has run to seed in unbelief." So Shakespeare reminds us in "Timon of Athens," that

> There is boundless theft in limited profession.

Selden packs the same thought into his famous saying, "No man is the wiser for his learning," and Milton expands it in his noble prose:

> There is scarce one saying in the gospel but must be read with limitations and distinctions to be rightly understood; for Christ gives no full comments or continued discourses, but speaks oft in monosyllables, like a master scattering the heavenly grain of his doctrine like pearls here and there, which requires a skillful and laborious gatherer, who must compare the words he finds with other precepts, with the end of every ordinance, and with the general analogy of evangelical doctrine; otherwise, many particular sayings would be but strange, repugnant riddles.

In a word, keep your exegesis subservient to your aim. Interpret Scripture. Do not spend a moment of your half-hour over details which only divert the mind from the main purpose of your discourse. His successor in London with justice extols Edward Irving, because in his preaching "by bringing out the fullness of the all-embracing Bible, and by carrying hearers who had hitherto rested in texts right into the truths which these texts contained, he relieved evangelism from the reproach of intellectual poverty."

III. The advantages of exegesis in the sermon.

1. Obviously it tends to hold the preacher down to his office as an interpreter of Scripture. In every sermon the two essential elements are explanation and application. Without explanation the argumentative part of a sermon is apt to be weak in its premises, and therefore futile in its conclusions; while the hortatory part is almost sure to lack in force, and the preacher so fights as one that beateth the air.

2. Obviously also, sound exegesis is in keeping with the philosophical method of research, that is, to seek for truth and to explain it; and all inquiry, whether in the realm of mind or of matter, should formulate itself in an explanation, or exegesis. No attack upon the dogmatism of science can carry any weight so long as it is urged by a preacher who is himself falling into the pulpit snare of mistaking assertion for proof. One of the most effective weapons in the hands of the Reformers is wielded by Melanchthon when he avers, "A single certain and simple sense is everywhere to be sought in connection with the rules of grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric." To a company of students the Duke of Argyle says: "Analysis is the one all-powerful instrument of research in the physical sciences." You will find it not less powerful in casting light on the operations of the mind itself. "If anything I have ever written or spoken has been of the least use to any one in dealing with the great problems of life, it has

been but an instinct which I have had from my earliest years to examine and analyze the wording of every proposition which is presented for our acceptance."

3. A third advantage in exegesis wisely used in the sermon is that it carries with it a sense of authority. This authority is seen in its influence alike on the preacher himself, on his sermon, and on his congregation.

(1) For the preacher it may be enough to remind him of the conviction which two of the greatest masters of his craft have left us. Luther says: "In all sciences the ablest professors are they who have thoroughly mastered the text; *Bonus Textuarius, bonus Theologus,*" the best theologian is he who is most versed in the Holy Scriptures.[1] Jonathan Edwards in one powerful sentence put a truth destructive of all loose pulpit methods when he declared, "He that doth not understand, can receive no faith nor any other grace."[2]

How great is the influence of this element of exegesis in the sermon what has already been said should sufficiently show. The integrity of the sermon will be affected by it. Convinced that it is his duty to interpret the word of God honestly, and that his sermon will be effective in proportion as he does so, the preacher will keep himself to simple lines. He will not accommodate his text

[1] Luther, "Table Talk."

[2] Edwards, sermon on "The Importance of the Knowledge of Divine Truth."

to the subject on which he wishes to speak; he will avoid motto or fragmentary texts; he will keep clear of allegorizing; and he will found his sermon on the rock of a true and faithful exposition of the words and thoughts of his text.

And it is safe to add that the freshness of our sermons largely depends on our use of sound exegesis—this because exegesis gives us thought, which was what Daniel Webster intended when he said, "I get my ideas by attention to definitions." To two things Dr. Maclaren traces any influence he has been able to exert in the direction of stimulating and influencing young ministers: first to hard work at his Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament; and, secondly, to the fact that from the beginning of his ministry he has endeavored to make his preaching expository and explanatory of the word of God as he understood it. What he adds it will be well for all preachers to remember:

> Why so many people are tired of preaching is because some preachers merely take a text on which to hang pretty things without any regard to its true meaning. If God thought it worth while to give us a book, surely we should give its truths the meaning he designed.

(2) This mature conviction of one who has for over fifty years stood in the forefront among the preachers of our Protestant Christendom is significant for what it says as to the congregation also. A careful and intelligent exegesis in the sermon trains hearers to look not for human opinions but

for the word of the Lord. This it is which meets unbelief with the sword of the Spirit, arouses the dull conscience and enlightens the darkened mind, forces indecision to take action, confirms faith in its confidence, and throughout the congregation quickens the spirit of honest inquiry. Prof. A. B. Bruce does well to remind preachers that a minister has to educate the minds of his people as well as their hearts. It is due alike to its great history, to its vast opportunity, and to its weighty obligation, to insist that the pulpit must be redeemed from the contempt into which pious platitudes and commonplaces, and the rhetoric which, like Ephraim, feedeth on wind, have done their utmost to bring it.

The failure of more than one great spiritual movement to arrest and retain the intellectual forces of the age is to be traced in part to the lack of trustworthy scholarship and conscientious exegetical skill on the part of those who directed it. On the other hand, who shall estimate the value to the Protestant Reformation of the revival of sound biblical exegesis? Take that away from the sermons of Luther and Calvin, from the expositions of Colet, from the treatises of Melanchthon and Erasmus, and humanly speaking, that mightiest religious movement in church history lies like Samson shorn of his strength.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

I. The Importance of Argument in Preaching.
   1. This may be seen from Scripture.
   2. History bears witness to it.
   3. Our experience testifies to it.

II. The Place which Argument should Hold in the Sermon.
   1. An element of argument needful in every sermon: (1) May be confined to statement; (2) Should be seen in the logical consistency of the discourse; (3) And in the line of thought pursued.
   2. Some sermons may be distinctively argumentative: (1) Sermons dealing with special points in theology; (2) Sermons preached at critical times.

   Counsels. 1. Remember what is the preacher's special duty.
   2. Keep in view the true end of preaching.
   3. Leave the right impression on the mind of the hearer.
   4. Test your preaching by examining its effects.

III. Character of the Argument in the Sermon.
   1. The Argument from Testimony.
   2. The Argument from Analogy.
   3. The Argument from Cause to Effect.
   4. The Argument from Effect to Cause.
   5. The Argument from Cumulative Evidence.

XV

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

We have said that in every sermon there should be statement, argument, and illustration. The prominence which has been given to statement in our estimate of these three will be understood if we reflect that without it argument is out of the question, and illustration futile and unprofitable. Supposing that the foundations of the sermon have been laid in a painstaking exegesis of the text or theme, we are prepared to consider, in the next place, the part played by argument.

Argument

I. Consider the importance of argument in preaching.

1. This may be seen from Scripture. Pictorial though it was, a strain of reasoning ran through the teaching of Jesus.[1] When it was first preached by the apostles the gospel was preached argumentatively.[2] Our faith in the great central truths of salvation rests on a basis of argument. This is emphatically true of the resurrection of our Lord, to which in their preaching the apostles gave such

[1] Luke 2 : 46; Mark 11 : 29; Matt. 22 : 41.
[2] Acts 9 : 20–22; Acts 17 : 2, 3, 17; Acts 18 : 4.

prominence. Faith in the actual resurrection of Jesus rests on the argument from testimony;[1] and faith in the resurrection of the believer rests on the argument from analogy.[2]

2. History bears witness to the same effect. Indifference, skepticism, or open hostility to the Christian religion have, from the earliest times until now, been encountered by a long and noble succession of apologists. Butler's "Fifteen sermons" were "designed to make men think logically on religious matters." As president of Yale College, Doctor Dwight turned the tide of fashionable infidelity by his sermons to the students. C. G. Finney met audiences of lawyers with an acumen not surpassed by any of his hearers, and reasoned conclusively in favor of the leading doctrines of Christianity. Chief Justice Chase, at a certain period of his life, studied the Christian religion as a matter capable of demonstration or confutation, treating it precisely as he would a question of law, "and the result was a firm conviction that it is divine in its origin, authority, and power."

3. Our own experience in this matter may be appealed to. Paley says, "He only discovers who proves." Before he has spent many years in his vocation, the Christian minister should have furnished himself with a working theology adequate to almost every kind of doubt. His personal ex-

[1] 1 Cor. 15 : 1–8.

[2] 1 Cor. 15 : 35–45; C. R. Morrison, "Proofs of the Resurrection from a Lawyer's Standpoint."

perience may remind him that it was the reasonableness of the religion of Jesus that convinced him. His pastoral visitations will very likely bring home to him the fact that those sermons make the most lasting impression in which there is an element of clear and simple argument. His observation of his own pulpit work, and of that of his neighbors, will witness that a preacher who possesses honest skill in argument is sure to command the attention and respect of the most intelligent hearers. The pulpit is responsible for a large measure of the polite indifference with which so very many sermons are treated by men who assume no such attitude in regard to serious intellectual effort. We have still need to lay to heart John Foster's complaint: "There is a great deficiency of what may be called conclusive writing and speaking. How seldom we feel at the end of the passage or discourse that something is settled and done." [1]

II. Pass now to the place which argument should hold in the sermon.

1. In every sermon there should be an element of argument.

(1) Even if the preacher confine himself to statement only his statement may have all the force and effect of elaborate reasoning. The power of clear statement is the great power in

[1] John Foster, "Life and Letters," p. 117. See also Foster's essay "On the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion."

the pulpit as at the bar. "Half the controversies in the world, could they be brought to a plain issue, would be brought to a prompt termination."[1] Others besides his own countrymen might have been included in the charge brought against them by Professor Huxley when he said, "Our one great want is lucidity." It will be well for the preacher to estimate at something near its real value the importance of facts as distinguished from theories. Let him first make sure of them, mindful of Johnson's assertion, "The hardest thing in the world, sir, is to get possession of a fact." With the facts of Christianity it is that he is chiefly concerned, and about them gather the opinions of the age, the drifts of current and transient thought, and the shifting emphasis which almost every year places upon this or that phase of religion, very much as about the mountain peaks gather the clouds and mists and sunshine and shadow of the hour. He must hold fast in his preaching by what Goethe calls "this central and substantial kernel of the matter, which remains unaffected by any change of condition that time can produce, just as a well-conditioned soul is not disturbed by any accident that may befall the body in which it lies encased."

(2) This element of argument should be found also in the logical consistency of the sermon. Here it is that the value of a clear and careful plan is so apparent. The plan should be worked

[1] J. H. Newman.

over and over again until it is perfectly satisfactory. To stop short of this is to tempt failure. A defective plan will betray its presence by and by in a defective sermon. Robert Murray McCheyne says that as a student he despised the rules for sermon-making which he received from his professor, but when engaged in the active work of the ministry he changed his mind. "Now I feel I must use them, for nothing is more needful for making a sermon memorable and impressive than a logical arrangement." [1]

(3) But we go further when we urge that this element of argument should be manifest in the line of thought which the preacher pursues. In every sermon something should call for proof, and receive it. Resolve, by all means, to do your utmost to rescue the pulpit from the disdain poured upon it, not without reason, in consequence of mere dogmatic assertion, or vapid exhortations, or featureless commonplace. John Ruskin writes to a college friend, as one who is himself friendly to preaching:

> Yet it requires the preaching of a considerable deal of patience to make one sit out some sermons comfortably. I go, I hope, to receive real benefit of some kind or another; but then how am I to be benefited? Not by the bare rehearsal of duties which I know as well as my alphabet; not by the repetition of motives which are constantly before me, and which I never act upon; not by the enunciation of truths which I perpetually hear, and never believe;

[1] R. M. McCheyne, "Memoir," p. 29.

but by giving explanation to the duties, force to the motives, proof to the facts.

2. Some sermons may be distinctively argumentative.

(1) Among these we specify sermons which deal with disputed points in theology.[1] Almost all the subjects of which we treat in our sermons will now and then demand to be considered in this way. To deliver a series of consecutive discourses on "Old Testament difficulties" may not be a wise thing to do; but to carry such a series in one's mind and without distinct announcement to give in their order the sermons in such a course occasionally, is certainly worthy of commendation. Such subjects as prayer, sin, the atonement, justification by faith, require to be treated in frank recognition of the fact that there are minds in our congregations which hold them in doubt. And yet even in dealing with disputed points of theology in the pulpit, it is often well to treat them inferentially. They are not to be considered as all of them capable of proof. Professor Jowett "deprecated any fixed statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, not because he would deny it, but because he would consider human thought conceiving it necessarily inadequate and every expression equally illusive." The preacher may hesitate to use in his pulpit discourse the term "Trinity," because it does not occur in the New Testament

[1] *E. g.*, Canon Liddon, "Some Elements of Religion." Archbishop Magee, "Norwich Cathedral Discourses,"

and because it has been associated in church history with fierce and often shameful wrangling. And yet he will preach the doctrine by inference, as it is set forth, for example, by the Apostle Peter,[1] and he will do it in the spirit of Horace Bushnell's confession: "When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost; my heart says the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart."[2]

(2) Again, sermons preached at critical times will often need to be cast in a mold of argument. By the title of his volume of Yale Lectures on "The Gospel for an Age of Doubt," Dr. Van Dyke has assumed that we live in a time which is "full of the sorrowful and confused confessions of doubt." There is hope in the indisputable fact that this doubt is not mocking or scornful in its spirit, but rather yearns for a renewal of faith, and with the poet finds it

> little joy,
> To know I am farther off from heaven
> Than when I was a boy.

Beyond any question it is necessary that the preacher should understand "the serious and pathetic temper of the age"; and yet he will do

[1] 1 Peter 1 : 1, 2. [2] Horace Bushnell's "Life," p. 56.

well to classify doubt in his treatment of it in the pulpit. It is not all of the kind which finds expression in Tennyson's "In Memoriam" or "Amiel's Journal." A specialist in skepticism[1] divides unbelievers into ten classes according as their attitude toward religion is identified with indifference, naturalism, doubt, antipathy, atheism, pantheism, deism, agnosticism, positivism, or skepticism. The preacher must distinguish the doubt which is generated by a corrupt heart and where the wish is father to the thought, from that which comes from the disappointments and sorrows of a hard life, or from the intellectual perplexities of men who are like Jacobi, "Christians with the heart, but Pagans with the head."

We offer four counsels at this point.

(*a*) Remember what is the preacher's special duty. It is to preach the word, deliver God's message to man. "The establishment of positive truth instead of the negative destruction of error, was the principle on which the whole of F. W. Robertson's controversial teaching was founded."

(*b*) Always keep in view the true end of preaching. This is persuasion. Argument is only a means to this end. It is possible to be a convincing and yet not a persuasive preacher, and, worse yet, it is possible to lay ourselves open to the charge brought against Carlyle that "he stirred everything but settled nothing." "After all," as Cardinal Newman says, "man is not a reasoning

[1] Rev. A. J. Harrison,

animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal."

(*c*) Be very careful to leave the right impression on the minds of your hearers. The permanent impression should be chiefly moral and spiritual, rather than intellectual. A sermon which is completely covered by the assertion that it is "an intellectual treat" is, it has been said, "a very bad sermon." Professor Drummond on one occasion warned preachers against "killing the old doctrine and ostentatiously calling on their congregations to attend the funeral." This is not what a minister of the gospel has to do. The funeral baked meats furnished at such occasions will not satisfy the spiritual cravings of our hearers. Still from their pews the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.[1]

(*d*) Learn to test your preaching by examining its effects. To be admired, wondered at, followed, on account of our powers of argument, or indeed of any mere intellectual gift, is not the preacher's true aim. Be satisfied with no results which would not have satisfied Jesus himself when he was on earth. Such transient popularity called only for tears from him, and it was to the people of the one little city which never failed to welcome him that he addressed his weightiest woes, "because they believed not." An appreciative satisfaction is not what we should look for at the hands of those who are not yet reconciled to God, or who,

[1] R. Gee, "Our Preachers," p. 142.

even if reconciled, are still far short of perfection. "I should suspect his preaching had no salt in it," Fuller quaintly says, "if no galled horse did wince."

III. Something needs to be said now as to the character of the argument in the sermon.

In dealing with this part of our subject we will confine ourselves to those kinds of argument which will be of special service to the preacher. In its wider aspects argument is treated in the various handbooks of logic, and to them the preacher may with profit occasionally turn.[1]

1. The Argument from Testimony.[2] Here, since the appeal is to history, a close adherence to incontrovertible facts is of the first importance. Such a subject as the resurrection of Jesus[3] offers a fine field for this kind of argument, and it seems as though at the present time especially the preacher needs to make use of the testimony of the apostles and eye-witnesses to a great fact in history which cannot be relegated to the region of myth without impugning the whole moral character of the New Testament writers.

2. The Argument from Analogy.[4] No more effective method of arguing than this can be used by the preacher, because the ordinary reader is familiar with the world from which the analogy is

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[1] Broadus, "The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons," Chap. VI.

[2] John 9. [3] Westcott, "The Gospel of the Resurrection."

[4] Mark 4 : 3–9 ; James 5 : 7, 8.

taken; and so analogy is illustration as well as argument. Yet it needs to be remembered that this kind of argument must not be pushed too far. Analogy implies only a partial degree of likeness. Positive conclusions cannot be drawn from analogy, but only probable conclusions, which become strong in their power to convince in proportion as the analogy is close.[1]

3. The Argument from Cause and Effect.[2] In dealing with the natural attributes of the Deity this species of argument is valuable. His attributes being assumed as granted, we argue from them to their manifestations here, among men. "God is love," what then may we expect as to his purposes, his actions, his ultimate resolve for us? The facts which are commonly granted must form the premises for the argument, and the preacher's skill is shown by the use which he makes of points that are generally conceded.

4. The Argument from the Effect to the Cause.[3] This line of reasoning is especially valuable because all men can perceive and decide—in some measure at least—upon effects with which they are familiar. Paley's use of this form of argument in his "Natural Theology" was more generally admired fifty years ago than it is now; but the Bible is itself too full of appeals to the wisdom,

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[1] Pritchard, "Analysis of Nature and Grace."

[2] Hugh Macmillan, D. D., "Bible Teachings in Nature," Rom. 5 : 1; Rom. 8 : 17.

[3] Acts 4 : 13.

power, and benevolence of God based on a study of his work[1] for the weapon which Paley wielded with such good effect to be laid aside as of no further use.

5. The Argument from Cumulative Evidence.[2] In preaching this may be made to include presumptive evidence and the evidence from induction. "The degree of probability is as the frequency with which we have observed the same things. It becomes presumption, opinion, conviction, and forms a rule of hope and judgment.[3] Be careful, in accumulating and marshaling your proofs, to range them in order, so that they shall rise in dignity and importance.

The argument from experience which enters so largely into pastoral sermons finds its place and its efficacy here. Every year adds to its weight. All the history of the spiritual life since his time augments the force of David's resolve, "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."[4]

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[1] Ps. 94 : 9. [2] Rom. 8 : 35–39.
[3] Angus, Introduction to Butler's "Analogy of Religion."
[4] Ps. 63 : 7.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

IV. How to Acquire Skill in Argument.

1. Recognize the value of a logical mind.
2. Study your own mental constitution.
3. Maintain throughout your ministry argumentative studies.
4. In your composition, aim at clear expression.

V. Counsels as to the Employment of Argument in the Sermon.

1. Never argue for argument's sake: (1) Tempted by self-conceit; (2) Proving what is not disputed; (3) Arguing upon matters of little moment.
2. Do not readily engage in controversy at the beginning of your ministry.
3. Recognize the necessary limitations of argument.
4. Respect the honorable limits of pulpit controversy.
5. Acquaint yourself with the subject on which you propose to argue.
6. If led into controversy, preserve the character of a Christian gentleman.
7. Avoid unnecessary controversy with brother ministers, and other Christian denominations.
8. Mingle rhetoric and logic.
9. Let Scripture remain your final appeal.

XVI

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

IV. We may here say something as to acquiring skill in argument. How best can that be done?

Argument (Continued)

1. First then, let the preacher recognize how valuable to him in his ministry is a logical mind. Lacking this, preachers have brought not themselves alone, but also their vocation into contempt. Their minds are what Coleridge termed "non-sequacious," and their hearers soon learn to distrust their conclusions. For it is beyond question that men delight in argument. The acutest minds in the country followed the long trains of thought with which C. G. Finney held his great audiences spell-bound. An orator of no mean order in our own time has said, in counseling young speakers: "Always bear in mind that an audience is most interested when you appeal to its intelligence. The great fault of public speakers nowadays is an attempt to be oratorical. Rhetoric and imagery are simply the ornaments of oratory; argument is its substance."[1]

2. In order to make your sermons logically effective, it will be well that you study your own

[1] Mr. Bourke Cockran.

mental constitution. If you have a natural aptitude for logical processes be on your guard against becoming too hard and unsympathetic in your method of address. If, as many speakers do, you possess what I may call the logical instinct, you will certainly have one faculty in common with your hearers. They may be fully capable of coming to sound conclusion although at the same time entirely ignorant of the laws of processes and reasoning.[1] The large proportion of preachers, and often among them very good speakers too, are not so much logical as rhetorical. They love to speak, and the temptation to cover up a defective line of argument with the flowers of oratory, declaiming when they ought to demonstrate, is strong within them. Selden's advice is excellent: "First in your sermon use your logic and then your rhetoric. Rhetoric without logic is like leaves and blossoms without fruit."[2] Remember, then, that assertion is not proof. "He who establishes his argument by noise and command," says Montaigne, "shows that reason is weak," and General von Moltke, in his "Memoirs," remarks that "The pulpit zealot who tries to persuade where he cannot convince, empties the church with his sermons."

3. Throughout your ministry it will be well that you maintain argumentative studies. Analyze, for example, the arguments of the New Testament.[3]

[1] Dr. Howard Crosby, "Yale Lectures on Preaching," p. 69.
[2] W. Mathews, "The Great Conversers," p. 23.
[3] *E. g.*, Romans.

Keep well informed on current theological controversies. Take with you on your summer vacation the book which is at the time creating discussion among thinking men, and spend an hour or two every day in carefully reading and summarizing its contents. Where possible attend the courts of law, and study the various ways of putting a point so as to carry the jury. Seek to profit by the friendship of able lawyers.[1] It cost Abraham Lincoln a long struggle to understand what constitutes proof; and in order to master the principles of reasoning he left the law office where he was reading, and through a cheerless winter spelled out his geometry by the light of pitch-pine knots in his father's log hut. "Then in the spring, when I had got through with it, I said to myself one day, 'Abe, do you know now when a thing is proved?' And I answered right out loud, 'Yes, sir, I do.' 'Then you may go back to the law shop.' And I went."

4. Practise composition with a special view to cultivating clearness of expression. Think an argument through, and then put it in precise language. Vast harm is done in the pulpit by loose and inaccurate rhetoric. Analyze the elements of your own sermon. Face the question, What do my hearers think that I mean? and be not like "jesting Pilate who waited not for the answer." Bishop Wilberforce was chagrined when a poor countryman came to him in the churchyard, after he had preached a sermon demonstrating as he

[1] F. W. Robertson, "Life and Letters," Letter 138.

thought most conclusively the existence of God, with the assurance that "for all the bishop had said yet he did believe after all that there was a God." The cynical usher of the church in Oxford where the Bampton Lectures, designed "to confirm and establish the Christian Faith," are delivered, was once heard to say, "I have heard the Bampton Lectures for thirty years; and, thank God, I am a Christian still."[1]

V. We conclude by offering some counsels as to the employment of argument in the sermon.[2]

1. Our first counsel is, never argue for argument's sake.

(1) This is done when our conceit of our reasoning powers tempts us to put our points in a controversial way. There are preachers who know how to raise a blister but are utterly ignorant as how to heal it. To a friend with whom he found himself disputing without any promise of good coming from it, Dr. Johnson said: "Come, we do not want to get the better of one another; we want to increase one another's ideas." Pascal anticipated Johnson in making this point when he wrote: "It is the argument that delights us and not the victory. We love to watch the conflict of opinion; but the plain truth we do not care to look at."[3] How happily in his terse way Spurgeon hits the mark: "It is never worth while to

[1] See Duke of Argyll, "What is Truth?" p. 16.
[2] See "Life of A. P. Stanley, D. D.," Vol. II., p. 135.
[3] Tulloch's "Life of Pascal," p. 172.

make rents in a garment for the sake of mending them, nor to create doubts in order to show how cleverly we can quiet them."

(2) We are guilty of making the same mistake when we labor to prove what is not disputed. Our congregations are not infidel clubs. The truths of the Christian religion are generally accepted by them. What we need to do is to show how indispensable these truths are; not so much that they are so, as that they must be so. It is to be questioned whether as much good as harm has been done by fencing matches between believers and atheists; but certainly the ordinary church service is no place in which to practise our weapons. It is eminently unwise to introduce into the pulpit controversial books or to give prominence to the names of freethinkers. Let them do their own advertising at their own expense. Your duty is not so much to preach down error as it is to preach up truth.

(3) Nor are we warranted in the limited time which is afforded us, in arguing upon matters which are of little or no importance. "What can be more hopeless," writes Henry Rogers,[1] "than the attempt to engage the attention and interest the feelings of a common audience in metaphysical subtleties?" "Dry and dreary to us who asked for the celestial manna," is Longfellow's comment in his "Journal" after listening to "a most logical discourse." George Eliot drew from

[1] "Essays," Vol. II., p. 226.

the life when she depicted the Sunday service in Shepperton Church:

> The sermon was an extremely argumentative one on the Incarnation, which as it was preached to a congregation not one of whom had any doubt of that doctrine and to whom the Socinian's theories confuted were as unknown as the Arimaspians, was exceedingly well adapted to trouble and confuse the Shepperton mind.

Lowell has given sound advice which is unhappily not yet unnecessary in his homely couplet:

> It is surely better to preach to the living,
> Than keeping a worrying them old Jews.

2. At the beginning of your ministry do not readily engage in controversy. Be constructive rather than destructive. Drawing his image from the fashionable sport of his day, an old Puritan says: "Controversies require sharpness of wit, and some cunning to find out Satan's sophistries. Young cockerels that begin but to crow may not set upon the great cocks of the game." Besides, to preach positive truth will give a tone of authoritativeness to your sermons, and will very largely determine the cast of all your homiletical work. "Eloquence," Pascal says admirably, "should prevail by gentle suasion, not by constraint. It should reign, not tyrannize."[1] As a fact very few preachers can argue well, and very few hearers are converted by controversy. The spirit which is

[1] Tulloch's "Pascal," p. 109.

generated is not the spirit in which the truth loves to find a lodgment.

3. By all means recognize the necessary limitations of argument. Are there not truths of the first moment in our religion which are incapable of proof to the unregenerate hearer? Spiritual things are only spiritually discerned. Argument may flatter the vanity of an unconverted man, and leave his conscience untouched. "Good logic may remove difficulties which impede belief in sincere souls, but faith has its roots in a moral temper, and the absence of this temper reduces the most cogent arguments to silence."[1] Our first duty is to deliver our message, to proclaim the love of God in Christ and to press it home on the acceptance of our hearers.

4. We add (as having a close bearing on the last counsel), respect the honorable limits of pulpit controversy. Is there not too much reason for Voltaire's sneer at "pulpit Christianity preached six feet above contradiction"? Have we not known preachers who have been guilty of degrading the throne of Christian oratory into a coward's castle, "from which a man surrounded by his friends, in the absence of his opponents, secure of applause and safe from a reply, denounces those who differ from him"?[2] We do no injustice to our vocation when we assert that too often the preacher under these circumstances has recalled Hazlitt's

[1] "Life of E. B. Pusey," by H. P. Liddon Vol. I., p. 147.
[2] F. W. Robertson.

description of Coleridge, "An excellent talker, very—if you let him start from no premise and come to no conclusion." Lord Wensleydale, who spoke as a lawyer, was right when he said to an English clergyman: "Orators of your profession always have two great advantages: they have the court with them, and the other side is not heard." The preacher lays himself open to a suspicion of unfairness, and is even guilty of a certain measure of moral cowardice, who is in the habit of setting up an imaginary foe which indeed is often cast like Aaron's calf entirely in his own furnace, and demolishing it for the benefit of his hearers. To a curate who had been guilty of doing this, his rector said as they came back from church, "Very good, Mr. Jones; but next time get a better infidel." These conventional skeptics and atheists are only the puppets of the controversial rostrum—they have had their day and should cease to be. As a rule they never were anything but dummies, and it is time that they were banished from the pulpit of every intelligent and fair-minded preacher.

5. This counsel suggests another. Thoroughly acquaint yourself with the subject upon which you propose to argue. Archbishop Magee, referring to the teacher whose influence most powerfully affected him in his college days, says: "He first taught me how to think; before I met him I only knew how to argue."[1] Thought, which implies

[1] "Quarterly Review," January, 1897, p. 407.

reading and research, must lie back of all argument worthy of the name. Consider how long it takes a lawyer to get up his case, and how many and various are the sources to which he turns for his information. No lawyer would dare venture into court to argue on a question involving a poisonous drug or a mechanical invention so ill informed on the technicalities of his subject as is many a preacher when he rises in his pulpit to demolish what he ignorantly brands as "science." When Lord Coleridge said that "it is rare to find a man who understands clearly the point for which he is contending, and rarer still to find one who keeps to it if he does," he spoke as a man who had from his youth been a hearer of sermons as well as a hearer of cases-at-law. There is no longer any excuse for a preacher's ignorance of science, and we trust that the day has forever passed in which a man with any pretence to intelligence will attack from his pulpit what is now recognized as one of the foremost allies of our Christian religion. As for the man who rushes into a controversy for which he has neither natural aptitude nor acquired equipment, it may be sufficient to advise him to lay to heart the advice "not to raise the devil unless you can lay him."

6. Is it necessary to add, as another counsel, that if you are led into controversy you must be careful to preserve the character of a Christian gentleman?

Controversy necessarily involves a trial of tem-

per, and we need to be on our guard against that polemical spirit which is "its own judge and its own executioner."[1] "You cannot," as Carlyle says, "pull the shirt off a man—the skin off a man, in a way that will please him." But you may make the operation as painless as possible, and certainly the surgeon should himself be calm. The rhetorical nature is naturally excitable, and for this reason you had better never engage in controversy unless you have complete control over your own temper. When a discussion into which he had been drawn became unusually heated, Robert Hall suddenly closed the debate and retired to a distant corner of the room, where he was overheard praying, "Lamb of God! Lamb of God! calm my perturbed spirit." This was the wise course to pursue, even though to adopt it imperiled his reputation for controversial skill. The serene Addison has left us his opinion on this point: "Nothing can be more unjust or ridiculous than to be angry with another because he is not of your opinion. . . You cannot make a more false step or give your antagonist a greater advantage over you than by falling into a passion."

7. I may add, as pertinent to this point, the further counsel, Avoid most jealously unnecessary controversy with brother ministers or with other Christian denominations. Whitefield writes to Wesley that "he has learned a lesson from the attacks of Luther on the Zwinglians and others,

[1] Bishop Lightfoot,

who in all probability equally loved the Lord Jesus, notwithstanding they might differ from him in other points." "By the blessing of God," he adds—not without a suspicion of combativeness in his own tone—"provoke me to it as much as you please, I do not think ever to enter the lists of controversy with you on the points wherein we differ." More praiseworthy still is the determination of Philip Henry: "I am resolved to spend my strength on those things in which all spiritual Christians are agreed"; and we can all sympathize with gentle Archbishop Leighton as he sighs from the midst of fierce doctrinal controversies: "Oh, what are the things we seek to differ about, compared with the deep things of God?"

What has been said must not be taken as depreciating an intelligent maintenance and setting forth of the distinctive principles which separate between the Christian churches. It may be well that these be treated occasionally in our ordinary pulpit ministration; and there is no reason why they should not be handled in such a spirit as to command the respect and win the admiration of those who may nevertheless differ from our own conclusions.

8. Such sermons must not be confined to a formal logical statement, an extreme which is scarcely less to be commended than the opposite disposition to indulge in rhetorical flights when calm reasoning is called for.

Our hearers love illustrations, they appreciate a careful and telling choice of words, they enjoy the

rise and fall of rhetorical discourse. Logic alone can never hold an audience; but how much a congregation values the careful commingling of logic and rhetoric may be seen in the deep and powerful impression made on his hearers by Canon Liddon. His sermons are models of what such discourses should be, and his congregation at St. Paul's Cathedral was unsurpassed for intelligence.

9. As a last counsel we would say, Let Scripture remain your final appeal. Treat its declarations as dogmatic and authoritative. It is not with opinions or speculations that the Bible deals. It "declares," from the keynote in the first verse of Genesis to the final words of Revelation. You will do well to distinguish between what the Scriptures themselves say, and all human interpretations of their utterances, and comments on them. "It is a mistake to which many good Christian people are sorely tempted in this day, to assert such a connection between the eternal gospel and our deductions from the principles of that gospel as that the refutation of the one must be the refutation of the other." [1]

Be very careful in appealing to Scripture to do so intelligently and honestly. Remember Whately's distinction: "A desire to have Scripture on our side is one thing; a desire to be on the side of Scripture is quite another." Do not quote verses as proof texts unless they really are such, and before quoting refer to the Revised version.

[1] Dr. Alex. Maclaren.

Never encourage the impression on the part of your hearers that the Bible is on its trial, and that you are retained for its defense. No; as one preacher shrewdly puts it: "You are not in the pulpit to defend the Bible; the Bible is in the pulpit to defend you." The apologetic and only half-believing tone of the eighteenth century sermons really bred the skepticism which they aimed to remove. How wise was Dr. Johnson's answer to a friend who urged that truth should bear examination: "Yes, sir, but it is painful to be forced to defend it. Consider, sir, how should you like, though conscious of your innocence, to be tried before a jury for a capital crime once a week!" Our true policy is to assume the truths of Scripture. The burden of proof rests not with us, but with those who deny them. Surely it is fair at this age of the world to appeal to the testimony of the nineteen centuries and more of Christian history; to the years crowded with incidents, during which the Bible has held its own in the great centers of thought and action; and to the intellectual acuteness and moral nobleness of those who have believed in it.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON—Continued

SUMMARY

I. Reasons for Employing Illustrations in the Sermon.

Illustration mainly useful as exciting the imagination. Why appeal to the imagination in the sermon?

1. The nobleness of the imagination.
2. The imagination is the faculty most readily reached.
3. It is possessed by every one.
4. It makes the truth vivid.
5. It is constantly appealed to in Scripture.

II. The Various Kinds of Illustration.

1. Picturesque Words.
2. The Suggestion.
3. The Simile.
4. The Metaphor.
5. Full Description.
6. The Anecdote or Story.

III. Purposes Served by Illustration.

1. Of substantial use to the preacher: (1) In the conception of the sermon; (2) In the composition of the sermon. Giving: (*a*) Freshness; (*b*) Clearness; (*c*) Economy of expression.
2. Of service to the hearer: (1) Illustration arrests attention; (2) Quickens the apprehension of truth; (3) Promotes conviction.

XVII

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

Illustration

We come now to the most popular of the rhetorical elements of the sermon, namely, Illustration. It is not less important than exegesis and argument, but we put it last because ornament follows construction, and must not be suffered to usurp its place. One can live in a house without colored windows, but hardly in a house without foundations or walls.

I. Let us consider, first, some reasons why illustrations should be employed in the sermon.

The main purpose served by an illustration is to excite imagination in the mind of the hearer. The disposition to despise this gift in preaching arises in part, no doubt, from the abuse of it by some preachers, but still more from an ignorance of its true office and mission. So that the question before us is not so much why a preacher should use illustration, as it is why he should appeal to the imagination.[1]

1. I ask you to consider, then, the nobleness of the imagination. "The most boundless and restless faculty of the soul" is what Thomas Fuller—

[1] "Essays," by R. H. Hutton, Vol. II., p. 211.

himself one of the poets of the pulpit—called it. Napoleon, who knew how to appeal to it in order to kindle the enthusiasm of his soldiers, said, "Imagination rules the world"; and Carlyle placed it on the same height when he wrote in "Sartor Resartus," "Yes, friends, not our logical, mensurative faculty, but our imaginative one, is king over us." Coleridge touches a point of special interest to the preacher when he affirms that imagination is "that power of the finite mind which as far as possible corresponds to the creative power in the infinite mind." By this he means that it is the power to invent, which in man is equivalent to the power to create in God.

2. Consider, further, that imagination is the faculty which can be most readily reached in the mind of the ordinary hearer. By "struggling to idealize all objects of perception,"[1] it clothes those objects with interest, incites our curiosity, or rouses our enthusiasm. What was before inanimate now lives. No mere bare statement of fact as to the hours during which the builders of Jerusalem under Nehemiah toiled could set the scene before us so completely as does this one touch: "So he laboured in the work, and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared."[2]

Our experience as preachers will confirm the truth of Macaulay's words: "Logicians may reason about abstractions, but the great mass of men must

[1] Coleridge. [2] Neh. 4 : 21.

have images."[1] So it happens that it is in imagery that discourse clothes itself in moments when "it rises above the ground line of familiar facts and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought."[2]

3. The reason why this element of illustration is so essential in the sermon seems to be that although often dormant or even suppressed, every one possesses imagination. As Sainte-Beuve puts it: "There exists in almost every man a poet who has died in the course of his life." A still more famous French writer illustrates the sway of the imagination thus:

> The greatest philosopher in the world, passing over a precipice upon a plank a little broader than would be absolutely necessary for walking, though convinced by reason of his safety, would be overpowered by his imagination. Many a one could not even think of being in such a situation without sweating or turning pale.—*Pascal's "Thoughts."*

4. It is evident then, that imagination should be pressed into the service of the preacher if only for the help which it affords him in making truth vivid. We may note here that the imagination appeals alike to the intellectual, the moral, and the spiritual parts of our nature. Its hold upon the intellect is seen if we consider imagination as "the use which the reason makes of the material world."[3] By exciting our sympathy and helping

[1] "Essay on Milton." [2] Emerson.

[3] Emerson, "Nature," Chap. VI., p. 57, edition 1889. See also Mrs. Orr's "Life of Robert Browning," p. 409.

us to enter into the feelings of others it becomes a moral agency of vast influence. Bunyan, as some one has said, "saw principles like men walking in the street." The definition of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews illustrates its spiritual power: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."[1]

5. In the Bible the imagination is constantly appealed to. We may have remarked that the objection to the use of illustrations in sermons comes oftener than not from preachers who are themselves better versed in metaphysics than they are in Scripture. A return to biblical preaching has always been marked by a return to the use of illustrations. The Puritans, who are the most scriptural of preachers, are also the preachers whose sermons are the richest in imagery. Indeed, to understand it aright, the Bible of all books needs the help of the imagination. Something must certainly have been lacking in the constitution of such a man as Bishop Colenso, when on being questioned as to the literal accuracy of parts of Scripture which were meant to be understood figuratively, he answered, "Shall a man speak lies in the name of the Lord?" The burst of praise in the Psalms, the vigorous conception of the Almighty in the Prophets, the use which Jesus made of the world about him in his parables, the gorgeous pictures of the Revelation, are all appeals to the imagination, and without it to no one of

[1] Heb. 11 : 1, R. V.; cf. "Life of G. J. Romanes," p. 231.

them can we do justice. "Our Lord condescended to explain himself by allusion to every homely fact." A preacher of our own time has made a practical application of his habit of appealing to the familiar objects in Palestine, which, especially if we be country pastors, may be of service to us.

> Happy, I think, are they who living in the country and having these sights continually before their eyes, can avail themselves thereby of the silent lessons which by his precious bidding they are all made to teach; who hear in the wind the noiseless power; who see in the gentle rain and dew the sweet and kindly influence of the Holy Spirit; who never see the pruning of a tree, nor the sheep wandering on the down or folded in the night, or a stray sheep away from the flock; or the flowers of the field and their beauty; or the hen gathering her chickens under her wings; or any of these usual country sights, without calling to mind what the Lord of heaven and earth had said of each of them, and how they all and each tell of his will, and of his power, and of his infinite goodness and love.—*Moberly.*

II. We proceed, secondly, to enumerate the various kinds of illustrations which may be used in sermons, confining ourselves to those which are the most used and the most useful.

1. We begin with the preacher's vocabulary. Give vitality to your sentences by the use of picturesque words. Train yourself to choose those which are concrete rather than abstract. There are preachers who without employing many illustrations gain all the effect served by them, and do so more economically, by this method. "Picturesque expression" is what Lord Brougham de-

manded in the plea of the lawyer, and an occasional visitor to the courts of justice says that he can never forget how a venerable judge in sentencing some youths to be hanged for murder expressed his pain that he, an old and feeble man, should send two into eternity before himself who were "in the gristle and not yet in the bone of manhood."[1] Who that is at all familiar with the pages of Jeremy Taylor has not remarked how they sparkle with gems? Even on a casual glance the eye is caught by words which at once make their impression and tell their story.

2. Next in order to picturesque language comes the Suggestion. Here by a few rapid touches the desired effect is produced. The mind catches the illustration as it were at an angle, while it is giving its chief attention to the thing illustrated. Just enough is said to call up a picture, that and no more. Demosthenes did not divert the thoughts of his hearers from the vote of a united community, but only intensified the impression of its irresistible power when he used one of the most striking suggestions in all oratory: "The people gave their voice; and the danger which hung upon our borders went by like a cloud." This kind of illustration is very effective in poetry. The insatiable craving of war for blood needs but one adjective, and we feel its force when the poet Gray, writes of the "thirsty lance" of Mars. All the mystery and pathos of the deepening twilight

[1] R. Gee, "Our Sermons," p. 222.

at sea are suggested by Tennyson in the single phrase, "evening bell" in one of the last of his poems:

> Twilight and evening bell;
> And after that the dark.

In sermons the suggestion is not very common, perhaps because to make it needs a richer and readier imagination than most preachers possess. Beecher illustrates the power when he calls the twenty-third "the nightingale of the Psalms." So does Dr. Maclaren in many of his happiest turns of thought, as when, for example, depicting the awful power of sin to perpetuate and increase itself he says: "Every sin tells upon character and makes the repetition of itself more and more easy. 'None is barren among them.' And all sin is linked together in a slimy tangle like a field of seaweed, so that a man once caught in its oozy fingers is almost sure to drown;" or when he puts before his hearers one of the main characteristics of Paul in a brief statement and an equally brief illustration: "The apostle's mind acquires force by motion, and like a chariot-wheel catches fire as it revolves."

3. From the suggestion it is only a short step to the Simile, where one thing is likened to another. To this class of illustrations belong the parables of Jesus.[1] Patrick followed the example of his Master when to the barbarous Irish tribe he

[1] Matt. 7 : 24–27.

illustrated the doctrine of the Trinity by plucking from the green sward at his feet the three-leaved shamrock, and making it the text of his explanation and appeal. Jeremy Taylor would be supreme in the use of similes were it not that he carries his preference for them too far, and becomes himself their slave rather than their master.

4. The Metaphor differs from the simile inasmuch as it expresses likeness without the signs of comparison. John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees "a generation of vipers"; Jesus revealed his knowledge of Herod's character when he spoke of him as "that fox";[1] and Paul used no qualifying clause when turning to Ananias he said, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall."[2]

Carlyle, who himself used them with great effect, speaks of the "prodigious influence of metaphors." In preaching, as in all descriptions of oratory, when well chosen they are most effective. A suggestion as well as a metaphor can be found in the powerful imagery of Bishop Wilberforce, when to illustrate the tendency of one error to drive its victim into the embrace of another, which is seemingly its very opposite, he speaks of the man who is "borne on the wings of a boundless skepticism into the bosom of an unfathomable superstition." No elaboration could add form to Beecher's contemptuous picture of him who is false to his country: "A traitor is good fruit to hang from the bough of the tree of liberty."

[1] Matt. 3 : 7; Luke 13 : 32. [2] Acts 23 : 3.

5. The easiest of all forms of illustration, and the one which is the most affected by young speakers, is Full Description. In composing your first sermons you may find that your difficulty is not so much to enlarge as to curtail. This does not arise, however, from the abundance of your thought so much as from the perilous ease with which descriptive passages are spun out. If you will fearlessly go through the adjectives and slaughter those which really are unnecessary to the impression that you desire to make, and exchange the house-painter's brush for a camel's-hair pencil, and be content with covering a foot of canvas where now you cover a yard, you will have the satisfaction of discovering that any measure of thought there was in your sermon to begin with has survived the operation. A great word painter, such as Thomas Guthrie, may be allowed to indulge in full description, and all the more so because he knew how to use his illustrations as arguments; but it is a dangerous practice for the most of us, and taking up too much of the limited space allotted to the sermon, leaves on the hearer's mind the impression that he has been in a picture gallery rather than in a church.

6. A word or two will be sufficient for another class of illustrations, namely, the Anecdote or Story. The story is preferable to the anecdote because it is not so apt to be personal to the speaker; but whether it be the story or the anecdote the preacher will do well to be on his guard against

both of these easy methods of filling up the time and eking out the sermon. They are the snares into which indolence and incapacity fall readily enough. However illiterate she may have been, the old woman was right at heart when she preferred staying at home and reading Spurgeon's sermons to going to hear her own preacher whose sermons, she said, were "nothing but antidotes." She needed something more solid and satisfying than a succession of stories. That preacher is certainly on the down grade who suffers himself to fall into what John Wilkes so wittily characterized as his "anecdotage." Probably it requires more skill to tell a story well, just at the right time, at just the right length, and with evident aptness to the subject, than to use any other kind of illustration. Told with these precautions there can be no question but that it is often very effective. Emerson, who himself uses stories very sparingly, yet found himself "struck and stimulated by a good anecdote, any trial of heroism, of faithful service."

If there is one tendency more to be guarded against than telling stories and anecdotes, it is that to which this habit is very prone to lead, I mean appropriating to yourself the adventures or experiences of another. A practised orator says that the young speaker "should never tell long stories, and if he tell any story he should never say that it is a true story and that he knew the parties. This makes it a question of veracity, instead of a ques-

tion of art."[1] The most serious objection to the practice is of course its dishonesty, and yet the evidence is only too convincing that many a speaker in the fervor and flow of pulpit address is tempted to commit this sin. The very power which enables him to realize the scene, persuades him for the moment that he himself was actor in it.

Although they are commended by many preachers we venture to utter a note of warning against what are known as Cyclopedias of Illustrations. To them in part it is due that an illustration originally fresh and attractive becomes threadbare and hackneyed, the very Wandering Jew of the pulpit, and travels the ceaseless round of a thousand sermons from January to December, never seasonable, and yet apparently always in season. Who has not wearied of the green oasis and palm trees in the desert, and longed rather for the desolate stretches of sand whose monotony it was supposed to relieve? This much patronized illustration can certainly be traced back to the early part of the seventeenth century. Who has not wished that Michael Angelo had left the angel to slumber in the stone and said not a word about it? One original illustration, suggested to your own mind by a walk in the country, or by the reading of a volume of poetry, or by a round of pastoral calls, is worth a whole cyclopedia of borrowed material. What Robert Hall said of his friend Sir James

[1] Col. Robert Ingersoll,

Mackintosh is applicable, with a difference, to many a preacher who invests in a volume of this sort of literature and then proceeds to spread its contents in thick layers over his sermons: "His mind is a spacious repository, hung round with beautiful images, and when he wants one he has nothing to do but reach up his hand to a peg and take it down. But his images are not manufactured in his mind; they are imported."

III. What, it may next be asked, are the purposes served by illustration?

1. They are of substantial use to the preacher.

(1) The element of imagination needs to enter into the conception of his sermon. To himself imagination will be of service by virtue of a certain power to renew thought, indeed, almost to create it. He will look through forms, words, and even doctrines, and see in them as they are set in fresh lights so much fresh material. Ideas which are familiar and trite, will now come to him in new and rich clothing, invested with an unexpected charm.

(2) When he proceeds to compose his sermon, his imagination will continue to help him. It will give to his discourse the three advantages of freshness, clearness, and economy of expression. How greatly he may profit by possessing a fresh way of putting truth is apparent if we remember that he has no new gospel to preach, no new story to tell. It is because "the preacher has an oft-told tale to set before his people that

the subject-matter of Christian teaching pre-eminently requires illustration."[1] A sermon from the text "I am fearfully and wonderfully made,"[2] may naturally enough suggest a study of the five senses. A commonplace preacher will dilate upon this theme in a commonplace way; but listen to Bunyan as he puts it before us in concrete form:

> The famous town of Mansoul had five gates in at which to come, and out of which to go, and these were made likewise answerable to the walls, to wit, and such as could never be opened nor forced, but by the will and leave of those within. The names of these gates were these: Ear-gate, Eye-gate, Mouth-gate, Nose-gate, Feet-gate.—*John Bunyan, "The Holy War."*

As to clearness so much has been already said about it that in this place it will be enough to remind the preacher that an effective sermon needs both definition and description—the one is the outline, the other the filling in of the picture. Now illustrations are the filling in of the picture; and they are essential to clearness because they quicken comprehension, and by appealing to imagination, open a wide door to the reason. An idea which cannot be painted is an idea which ought not to be preached. Almost certainly it will not be understood by a general audience.

Economy of expression is also attained by a wise use of illustration. At once an impression is conveyed to the mind such as even a long and

[1] Andrew Fuller. [2] Ps. 139 : 14.

detailed description might fail to give. When William Knibb, coming back to England from Jamaica to plead for the freeing of the slaves, threw down on the platform of Exeter Hall, in London, the very fetters and chains with which the Negroes were loaded, he instantly attained his purpose. Here was visible history, and the audience was in a moment stirred to a passion of indignation which nothing short of emancipation could allay.

2. Equally serviceable are illustrations to the hearer.

(1) They arrest attention. "An illustration has more authority than a command."[1] Preaching on Abram, Bishop Wilberforce cannot fail to interest his congregation when he recalls this incident:

> Here we stand among the great progenitors of our race. Abram's birth was but two hundred and eighty years after the flood; a shorter period than has passed since Queen Elizabeth sat under a tree, which is still alive in Hatfield Park, and saw the approach of the royal messenger who brought her instead of the expected warrant to a dungeon and a scaffold, the tidings of her succession to the throne of England.

(2) They quicken the apprehension of truth. Dr. Guthrie, who assuredly deserves to be heard on this point, says: "By awakening and gratifying the imagination, the truth finds its way more readily to the heart and makes a deeper impression on the memory. The story, like a float, keeps it from sinking; like a nail, fastens it in the mind; like the

[1] Prof. Austin Phelps.

feathers of an arrow, makes it strike; and like the barb, makes it stick." Notice how even in enforcing the advantages of illustrating, Guthrie uses four illustrations. Who after reading these sentences can forget that illustrations float, hold fast, strike, stick? So Emerson says, in praise of his friend, Thoreau, that "he knew the worth of the imagination for the uplifting and consolation of human life, and liked to throw every thought into a symbol." Who can forget Victor Hugo's thought of his good bishop who "would comfort the grief that looks at a grave by showing it the grief that looks at a star."

(3) Illustrations promote conviction. Remember that the resemblance on which an illustration turns, often suggested by the word "like," ought not to be accidental. It inheres in the very nature of the things compared. A really good illustration should have points of close resemblance to the truth which it illustrates. Archbishop Trench is justified in insisting that because of the subtle harmonies which exist between the natural and spiritual worlds, our Lord's parables "are arguments, and may be challenged as witnesses."[1] To a friend who expressed to Sir William Hamilton his surprise that he, the most eminent of Scottish metaphysicians, should be so constant a member of Dr. Guthrie's congregation, the reply was: "Dr. Guthrie has the best of all logic; there is but one step between his premise and his conclusion."

[1] Trench, "Notes on the Parables," Introductory Essay.

"When metaphors," said another admirer of the great Scotch preacher, "rest on the unity between God's world and man's nature, they are arguments as well as illustrations."[1]

Coleridge anticipated this statement when he claimed for painting, which is of course a form of imagination, that it is the intermediate something between a thought and a thing." What Mr. Joseph Cook has said of Wendell Phillips is no doubt to a certain extent true of any speaker who has learned to use illustration wisely: "The seer is the logician who melts his logic in the fire of his emotion, and Mr. Phillips in oratory was a seer. His epigrams, his historical allusions, his anecdotes, his powerful passages of invective, are often arguments on fire."

[1] Dr. John Ker, see "Life of Thomas Guthrie, D. D.," Vol. II., p. 359, ed. 1875.

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON—CONTINUED

SUMMARY

IV. Sources From Which Illustrations May Be Drawn.

1. The Bible.
2. Daily life.
3. History.
4. Travel and scenery.
5. Natural history.
6. Literature.
7. Science.
8. Art.

V. Counsels.

1. Keep illustration subordinate to thought.
2. Do not illustrate over much.
3. Remember that an illustration must illustrate.
4. Let your illustration be apparent at once.
5. Let your illustrations be suitable: (1) Not equally good in all places; or (2) Under all circumstances; (3) Should be accurate.
6. Make your Bible the storehouse for your illustrations.

XVIII

RHETORICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

We may now pass on to glance at the various sources from which illustrations may be drawn.

Illustration (Continued)

1. Among these not alone his reverence for the book as a divine revelation but also his appreciation of its worth for this special purpose, will lead the preacher to put the Bible first. The same volume which gives him his text will also furnish him with his clearest statements of doctrine, his most convincing arguments, and his most effective illustration. How well the Puritans knew this their sermons, studded with Scripture names, incidents, and allusions, testify.[1] "No illustrations," says Spurgeon, "are so good as those from Scripture." Its biographies and histories, its types and ordinances, its felicities of thought and language, have all of them this in their favor, that they are already familiar in our mouths as household words. "Woven for three centuries into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history,"[2] the Bible in our version has a record almost as ex-

[1] See Nichol, "Library of Standard Puritan Divines."
[2] Professor Huxley.

tended and quite as illustrious in America. The ear of the congregation welcomes any allusion to the book which has "taken such hold of the world as no other."[1] Where Washington Irving wakened many a sleeping fancy, as he gratefully acknowledged in his old age, our hearers will find their minds quickened as well. We counsel that, so far as it is possible to do so, you draw the illustrations for your sermon in the first instance from the text. In preaching, for example, from Isa. 40 : 6–8 ("The voice said, Cry," etc.), the hillsides and villages of Palestine will enrich your sermons with material. Paul's words in 2 Cor. 3 : 18 will suggest a group of images drawn from the phrase "beholding as in a glass." A whole sermon lies in the etymology of the Greek word translated "clothed upon" in 1 Peter 5 : 5–7.

2. A true preacher is seen to advantage in the use which he makes of the incidents of daily life. His pastoral experiences, his own observations on the streets, in the home, while traveling, and in mingling with his fellows, will all enrich his treasury of illustrations. What Mr. Ruskin calls "imagination penetrative," the faculty which teaches us to realize the actual rather than the invisible, is of service here. Of course the life all about him must be referred to judiciously by the preacher. What comes to him in confidence he must never make public, he must avoid becoming too familiar and commonplace in the illustrations

[1] Theodore Parker.

taken from unheroic scenes and incidents, and he must repress the egotism which in the fluent speaker so easily becomes a second nature. But no preacher will go astray so long as he takes Jesus as a model. His figures were drawn, oftener than not, from his own life and from the lives of his neighbors. The lamp and the bushel, the coin lost in the dusky Oriental cottage, the hen and her chickens, the sheep wandering on the hills or safely sheltered in the fold, the wheat and tares springing up together in the field, the net cast into the sea, the wind blowing now east and now west, the ruddy heavens promising a fair morrow, the lowering sky forecasting foul weather, these and a hundred other homely touches, gave life and animation to the discourses of our Lord.

3. Illustrations drawn from history are not so popular now as they were in the days of the Puritans, whose pages seem to lay under contribution all the resources of heathen mythology and classical story. The preacher of to-day needs to avoid two extremes; he must refrain from referring to facts which are not well understood, and yet he must not fall into triteness. The familiar terms on which he lives with the lives of Cæsar or Alexander the Great suggest that he has been ransacking his Cyclopedia of Illustrations, the common pasturage for so many pretentious sermons. "We have heard much of late about Socrates, but very little about the Saviour," was the hint which a young preacher received from one of his judi-

cious hearers, and which sent him home resolved to turn from his second-hand storehouse to the words of eternal life. Yet by a wise employment of historical illustrations you can give prominence to the truth that through all the ages God has been controlling his world, and your experience will no doubt bear out Dean Stanley's assertion that[1] "of the three great manifestations of God to man—in nature, in conscience, in the course of human events—God in history will to a large part of mankind be the most persuasive."

4. Travel and scenery are of especial service to a preacher who is blest with "the painter's eye," and who has learned the truth of Shakespeare's words:

> What if earth
> Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
> Each to the other like, more than on earth is thought.

He is indeed fortunate if he possess in any measure what a critic[2] claims for Tennyson, "the power of compelling the external world to lend him a language for the noblest feelings." Jeremy Taylor comes back from the fields in springtime and writes, "every furrow in the book of Psalms is sown with seeds of thanksgiving." Spurgeon passes some fine old trees which are marked with a white cross to indicate that they are soon to be cut down. "So," he comments, "everything we have here is marked with the woodman's cross,

[1] "Life of A. P. Stanley," Vol. II., p. 318.
[2] R. H. Hutton, "Essays," Vol. II., p. 315.

and the axe must fall on all our joys." Dr. Raleigh turns from a map of Palestine and commenting upon the danger which besets us of being too much self-inclosed, says that the Christian must beware lest he have "a Dead Sea in the Holy Land of his nature." Mark Guy Pearse sees the upward swirl of the turbulent waters just where the tidal current and the strong set of the ocean meet around Cape Horn, swarming with fish which are brought to the surface only to fall victims to the hungry sea-fowl, and he catches the picture of those who are at once too religious to belong to the world and too worldly to belong to religion, torn by both and satisfied by neither." "A Christian's old age," says another preacher, "may be like Mount Hecla, which bears snow on its crest and a fire in its heart"; in the nests of birds plainly visible on the naked branches, Dr. J. W. Alexander finds a comparison for the hiding-places of man discovered by affliction; the remembrance of his father's orchard gives Beecher an illustration of a good old age: "I think every man ought to carry his boughs so full of fruit that like the apples which drop from silent dew they may fall by the weight of their own ripeness for whoever needs to be refreshed"; "Niagara stopped once," a preacher of our own time says; "the ice got into it, and the rainbow disappeared and the music was hushed: but no ice ever gets into the stream of God's love"; and from another pulpit we gather a singularly happy use of the art of

navigation: "The mariner must pay attention to four L's, namely, the log, the lead, the latitude, and the lookout. The log tells of what is behind, the lead speaks of what is below, the latitude shows what is around, and the lookout declares what is before. And herein is a sea parable, speaking plainly of the voyage of life."

5. A mine of illustrations too much neglected by most preachers may be found in natural history. To find how rich the Bible is in allusions to its stores may be alike a discovery and a reproof to him who for the first time makes a study of the plants and trees, the insects, reptiles, and beasts, mentioned in its pages. A good popular "Natural History," which the preacher may make his companion in his summer rambles, is to be recommended, and a new world may open to him who carries with him White's "Natural History of Selborne," the "Life of Audubon, the Naturalist," Darwin's "Voyage of the Beagle," Isaac Walton's inimitable "Angler," or the charming "Little Rivers"[1] of one of Walton's most sympathetic followers. The works of Dr. Hugh Macmillan will discover to him how an excellent preacher who is also an enthusiastic lover of nature, can find "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Bunyan knew his garden or he would not have written, "Christians are like the several flowers that have each of them the dew of heaven which,

[1] By Henry Van Dyke, D. D.

being shaken with the wind, they let fall at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished and become nourishers of others"; and the old preacher was no stranger to the barn, who prayed: "When the flail of affliction is upon me, let me not be the chaff that flies in thy face, but let me be the corn that lies at thy feet." An Australian pasture, where the cattle seeking for grass find only a brown stalk that crumbled to dust in their mouths, suggests to Dr. Maclaren "the world without Jesus Christ." Robertson, of Irvine, draws a lesson from the symbolism of trees when he says: "Some may never carry in their hands the palm branch of fame, some may never hold the olive branch of peace, some never handle the evergreen of hope; but all must bear the myrtle and cypress, as they march on to the dirgelike music of 'All flesh is grass.'" From the fact mentioned by Mark that Jesus before feeding the multitude made them sit down on "the green grass,"[1] Ruskin draws the lesson, "He gave them the seed of the herb; he bade them sit down upon the herb itself, which was as great a gift in its fitness for their joy and rest as its perfect fruit for their sustenance."[2] "If all that you want out of Christianity," Professor Drummond says, "is that it shall keep you straight, you cannot get it. Keeping straight is only one of the functions of the new nature. You cannot get a wing without getting a

[1] Mark 6 : 39.

[2] "Modern Painters," Vol. IV., Chap. XIV.

muscle which will work the wing, nor the muscle without a bone which will form a fulcrum for the muscle, and you cannot get this bone without getting proportional bones for the rest of the body."

6. The vast resources of literature offer another most profitable storehouse of pulpit illustration. Let the preacher make his sermon the richer for Macaulay's vivid portraits, and the rugged but powerful outlines of Carlyle, and the pathos of Charles Dickens, and the not unkindly home thrusts of Thackeray. Let him profit by the harvest of the quiet eye in many of Wordsworth's single lines, the rare felicity of Tennyson's epithets, the noble suggestion of Browning's "Saul," the glowing imagery of John Ruskin, and by the often profound reflections of George Eliot, "who has perhaps influenced preachers more than any other novelist."

Illustrations which are taken from such a book as "Pilgrim's Progress," from well-known biographies, or from the best literature of the mission field, are often most effective. Into the interleaved Bible may be gathered apt and unusual poetical quotations; and as a general observation it may be said that the great poets of our own language, in whose works so many of the orators of our country have found strength and stimulus, should be the friends and companions of our preachers also.

7. The time has now come when science can be acknowledged as a most powerful ally of re-

ligion. Even a cursory acquaintance with the discoveries and inventions which have made our century so memorable will enrich the preacher's store of illustrations. Dr. Chalmers' "Astronomical Discourses" set an example which the pulpit has been very slow to follow, of compelling the fairy tales of science to utter forth God; but probably ignorance more than prejudice is responsible for the neglect of one of the most affluent sources of pulpit illustration. Such ignorance is no longer pardonable. Suggestions and similes taken from science are available to any one who will observe the phenomena about him. It is due not to the pulpit alone or chiefly, but rather to him who is alike the subject of its message and the source of its strength that the preacher learns by careful observation to echo David's burst of praise, "O Lord, our Lord God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth."

8. It is time also that our preachers made far more use than they have hitherto done of art in their pulpit work. "I am preparing myself," wrote Prof. H. B. Smith, "to be a better preacher by the study of statuary and painting." Beecher finds in the two pictures combined in Raphael's Transfiguration "a figure of human life. Above, Christ often hovers in glorious light; while below, the devil is tearing the child." The fact that in a painter's studio he saw high-colored stones used by the artist to restore tone to his eyes when he has been working in pigments which had insensibly

weakened his sense of color, suggested to the same preacher the thought that "every day men need to have a sense of the invisible God; to be tuned, chorded, borne up to the ideal of a pure and lofty life. The three points of one of the last addresses which Professor Drummond delivered—first, work; second, God; third, love,"—he drew from the pathetic figures of the peasants who are seen resting on their hoes when from the village spire floats the sound of the evening bell, in Millet's "Angelus." Thus art becomes more than art as it aids the truth.

V. I conclude by offering some counsels as to the use of illustrations.

1. Then, let me say, in your sermons keep illustration subordinate to thought. Caligula was mad enough at times, but he was quite sane when he criticised the style of Seneca "as sand without lime." Lord Bacon does well to insist that "reasons are the pillars of discourse, and similitudes the windows." "Invent first," is the advice of Dr. Samuel Johnson, "and then embellish." Spurgeon praises Manton, the Puritan, because he was "too intent upon telling his message to think about how his sentences might be adorned." In his plain-spoken fashion Lyman Beecher counsels, "Never begin to flourish until you have said something substantial to build upon"; and to more than one writer is ascribed the happy maxim, "We must never construct ornament, but only ornament construction." The reason for this is appar-

ent if we reflect that "it is the direct affirmation of fact that commands attention." [1]

We are not putting too much emphasis upon this point when we insist that no amount of illustration will make up for paucity of thought, or even for dullness of style. The jewel in the swine's snout may degrade the jewel, but certainly it does not attract admiration to its unlovely setting.

2. Do not illustrate overmuch. To do this was the temptation of the Puritans, of the famous preachers of the eighteenth century (and especially of Jeremy Taylor), and in our own times of Thomas Guthrie. As a rule it may be said that one good illustration is sufficient for each point, and there is danger in multiplying your similes that you obscure or destroy that "simplicity which is essential to true greatness" [2] Yet brief illustrations following each other rapidly are often effective. Spurgeon drives home a truth which needs emphatic enforcement when he says, "Cold prayers are like arrows without heads, swords without edges, birds without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Those prayers that have no heavenly fire in them always freeze before they reach as high as heaven; but fervent prayer is very prevalent with God."

In no case is it wise to elaborate an illustration overmuch. "Eloquence," says Pascal, "is a picture of thought, and those who after having

[1] Dr. Marcus Dods. [2] William George Ward.

drawn a picture still go on, make a tableau and not a likeness." [1] For other and more serious reasons, because it is harrowing to the feelings, repulsive to good taste, and often degrading to the subject itself, it is eminently unwise to dwell in detail upon a painful theme. No elaboration can add to the solemn simplicity of the parable of the rich man who "being in torments lifted up his eyes." [2] The reticence of the evangelists in their accounts of the physical sufferings of our Lord should be respected by the preacher when he is describing the crucifixion.

3. It may seem almost a commonplace to ask you to remember that an illustration must illustrate. But the young preacher is so often beguiled into building an illustration into his sermon because it is beautiful or impressive that the counsel is not wholly unnecessary. There are discourses—and they are not entirely from young preachers either—which in the splendor and futility of their illustrations recall only the

> Rich windows that exclude the light,
> And passages that lead to nothing.

For this reason it is well to apply your illustration closely and with all your force of rhetoric. If it serve no better purpose than to excite feeling which exhausts itself with no practical effect, an illustration is a hindrance and not a help to the sermon. The appeals to the sympathy of your

[1] Tulloch, "Life of Pascal," p. 168. [2] Luke 16 : 23.

hearers by pictures of suffering, by the pathos of a wandering son and a praying mother, or by the harrowing experiences of the deathbed, are of little use, and sometimes they are worse than useless. "An habitual attention to exhibitions of fictitious distress is in every view calculated to check our moral improvement." [1]

4. I may add that your illustration must be apparent at once. It ought not to need explanation. For this reason it should be taken by preference from familiar scenes or circumstances. Recall the illustrations which Jesus used. For him sufficed

the most every-day articles of food and furniture, the commonest incidents of life, the most ordinary scenes and sounds of nature. The hen and her chickens, the leaking wine-skins of the vintner, the burning of autumn weeds, the peasant woman patching the old clothes of her husband or her boys, were not too trivial to be turned into themes for divine instruction by the Lord of glory. Such teaching is ever real and fresh and vivid.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

5. Be sure also that your illustrations are suitable. Without elaborating them, take care to make them fit the subject of the sermon and the circumstances of its delivery. We cease to wonder at the good taste and appropriateness which mark John Bright's illustrations when we learn with what pains he prepared them.[2]

[1] Dugald Stewart.

[2] "Life of Bishop Wilberforce," p. 436. "Life of Dr. James Hamilton," pp. 140, 141. See also Davies' "Successful Preachers," pp. 107, 328.

(1) Experience will teach you that an illustration which is good in one place and at one time may fail or positively offend when used under different circumstances. Study your audience, their occupations and manner of life, their places of abode, training, and tastes. Dr. John Ker wisely counsels the young preacher: "If you have to choose between the nightingale and the lark, by all means take the lark; if you have to choose between the passion-flower and the daisy, select the daisy; the people know the lark and the daisy, and they love them. They would rather hear of some

> Familiar matter of to-day,
> Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
> That hath been and may be again,

than of 'old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago.'"

(2) Equally important is it that your illustrations should be suitable to the circumstances under which they are used. Religion is too severe a matter to be treated in a trivial or jesting spirit. Figures of speech may be in place in a platform speech which are not to be tolerated in the sermon. Rowland Hill was often carried beyond the bounds of pulpit propriety by his sense of humor. It was lowering his subject to compare the love of our Lord to a large round of beef, from which "you may cut and come again." No worthy purpose was served, even with a coarse and illiterate crowd of hearers, when he said: "You all know

how difficult it is to catch a pig by the tail: you will find it equally so to catch the love of our Lord after backsliding."

(3) Another word of warning may be allowed here. Beware of inaccuracy in your illustrations. Know of what you are talking when you take your similes from nature or science or the occupations of the men and women to whom you are speaking. It was perplexing to any student of history when a Scotch preacher waxed eloquent over "the happy days that Cain and Abel had spent in their ancestral halls." A preacher in the neighborhood of the London docks pictured a ship at sea when wind and water roared wildly around it, and not content with asking, "Under such circumstances what did the captain do?" proceeded to answer his own inquiry, "Why keep close to the land, to be sure." This was more than one old sailor in the congregation could stand, and he muttered aloud, "Why don't he say, 'Keep her nose to the wind?'" "Begging your pardon," interpolated another old salt, by way of correcting a mistake as to the signal light carried by ships into which a well-known bishop had fallen when preaching on a New York pier, "It's the green light as hangs on the starboard and the red light to port, sir." The elder in a Scottish parish made no mistake when, being himself a farmer, he counseled his young pastor: "There's John: now speak to him on any subject except plowing and sowing, for John is sure to remark your deficiency on these, which he

perfectly understands; and if he should detect that you dinna ken about plowing and sowing, he'll no gie ye credit for understanding onything else."

On the other hand, if you will take the pains to acquaint yourself with the daily life of your congregation, no illustrations will be so sure to find a ready lodgment in their minds as those which come home to their practical experience. Edward Irving, it may be remembered, conquered the prejudices of the infidel shoemaker and won him to the church and to Christ by "kennin' a' aboot leather."

6. Once more, I advise that you make your Study Bible the storehouse for your illustrations. If the illustration which you desire to preserve can be cut out, paste it on the interleaved page. Where this is not possible, copy the quotation in full; or else in the margin opposite to the verse which it seems most aptly to illustrate write the reference to the volume in your library where it may be found. Thus in time your own Bible will become a rich and increasing treasury of material from which to illustrate your discourses.

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON

SUMMARY

I. Important that the Preacher Should Take an Independent Position.

1. The question is constantly recurring.
2. Delivery has much to do with effectiveness.
3. Yet it is not the prime essential.

II. Considerations which may Assist the Preacher to Decide which Method of Delivery to Adopt.

1. Temperament and constitution.
2. Intellectual characteristics.
3. The audience to be addressed.

III. Essentials, Whichever Method is Adopted.

1. Thorough preparation.
2. Suitable pulpit manner: (1) Be wide awake and alert; (2) Be natural; (3) Be in sympathy with your subject and audience: (*a*) In spirit; (*b*) In voice; (4) Be reverent; (5) Be self-possessed.

XIX

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON

I. It is of the first importance that every young preacher should take an independent position and settle it with himself in what way he can best deliver his sermon. **In General**

1. The fact that this question is one which constantly recurs, refusing to be silenced by the sweeping assertions of the advocates of this or that method, or to be settled by the prevailing custom of hour or place or church, may be taken as at any rate conclusive evidence that no one way is so evidently the best that any alternative to it is not to be considered. Over against the emphatic and comprehensive counsel of one of our great preachers, "Burn all your manuscripts and never write any more to be read in public," we may set the opinion of another who while holding that the free man is the man of most power to impress and persuade, is yet persuaded that "so long as men differ in aptitude and temperament so long ought there to be room for variety in method."

2. No one will question that the way in which a sermon is delivered has very much to do with its effectiveness. Was not St. Francis de Sales right

in saying, "You may utter volumes, and if you do not utter them well it is lost labor. Speak but little and that well, and you may effect much"? John Foster was extremely fastidious in his choice of words and in the structure of his sentences; and no man of his generation was his superior in originality of thought. He insisted that the effect of the sermon should depend upon these things alone. Delivery he professed to despise. Consequently he failed as a preacher. Who can wonder, indeed, when we learn from William Jay that

> His delivery all through was in a low and equable voice, with a kind of surly tone and frequent repetition of a word at the beginning of a sentence. He had a little fierceness occasionally in his eye, otherwise his face was set and his arms perfectly motionless?

The wit spoke not for one preacher but for many when he observed, on hearing that the sermons of a popular orator were to be published, "They ought to print the preacher, for the principal merit of his sermons is his delivery."

Many a good sermon is wrecked on the reef of a poor delivery; and many a very ordinary sermon is saved by learning to avoid it. As the best laws are said to be those which are best administered, so we are tempted to think that the best sermons are those which are best delivered.

> With preaching (so Doctor Guthrie put it), it is as with firing a gun, the manner is the powder, the matter is the shot; and it is well-known that a tallow candle with a suffi-

cient quantity of powder will go through a deal board that a leaden bullet would not pierce fired off with a feeble charge.

3. And yet we would not convey the impression that the method of delivery employed is by any means the prime essential to successful preaching. No, the method is secondary to the matter; as both method and matter are secondary to the man. However he may preach, the true man, if he has a message from God, will make himself heard. The man; the matter; the method; this is the right order.

II. In deciding which method of delivery you will adopt, there are many things to be considered. There may be good reasons why in certain cases some one is quite clearly the best.

1. Much will depend, for instance, upon temperament and constitution. "The lowest quality of the art of oratory," it has been said, "and yet on many occasions of the first importance, is a certain robust and radiant physical health; great volumes of animal heat. In the cold thinness of a morning audience, mere energy and mellowness is inestimable; wisdom and learning would be harsh and unwelcome compared with a substantial man, who is quite house-warming."[1]

2. Then again, the intellectual characteristics of a preacher may be such as to decide him in his choice of a method of delivery. The man whose mind is lacking in order and arrangement should

[1] G. J. Holyoake.

certainly avoid the shallows of a purely extemporaneous habit; and, on the other hand, he whose mind is naturally precise and logical may well learn how to speak without a manuscript.

3. To some extent, also, the character of the audience to be addressed must be taken into account. A congregation used to extemporaneous speech may fret under the trammels of paper; a congregation accustomed to hear the sermon read may not at once estimate at its true worth the sermon which, while conscientiously prepared beforehand, is preached without notes.

III. We may settle it at once that whichever method of delivery a preacher takes as his own, there are certain essentials which ought always to distinguish his sermon work.

1. First among these we mention thorough preparation. With more or less of fullness the whole service should be rehearsed in anticipation of public worship. The sermon itself should be so completely mastered that just as in a good equestrian statue man and horse are one, so the preacher and his discourse are inseparable. The sermon has become a part of himself. There has been no readier preacher in our century than Bishop Wilberforce, and yet in his diary more than once occurs the entry, "Very nervous because sermon was unprepared." Such nervousness may be a means of grace to the preacher who is tempted to rely on that treacherous stimulus which is known as "the spur of the moment."

2. Further, we must insist upon suitable pulpit manner.

(1) Be fully alive, wide awake, and alert. Pay just so much attention to health as will ensure your forgetting all about it.

(2) Use and practice should teach you to be perfectly natural, and to keep clear of any suspicion of ministerial professionalism. Insincerity of voice and affectation in manner carry their own punishment. An audience grows weary of them and of him who stoops to employ them. "I have sometimes thought," Emerson once said, "that in order to be a good minister it was necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers."

(3) To be in sympathy alike with your subject and your audience is another essential. It was because Whitefield felt the future in the present that he preached as he did. His sermons owed so much to his personality that as we have them reported they fail to explain the immense effect which they produced on his hearers. Remember South's noble words: "In this great work the trembling hand is still the steadiest; and the fearful heart the most likely to be victorious." Eloquence is logic touched by emotion, and therefore feeling is to the full as necessary as thought. His sermon was likely to be effective when Thomas Fuller could lay it at the feet of his Master and say: "I have steeped this in tears,

Lord: I once offered it dry; now I offer it wet." Fletcher, of Madeley, the saint of early Methodism, while preaching seemed to one who listened to him an angel in human form rather than a mortal man dwelling in a house of clay. A plain countryman going to hear Robert Murray McCheyne found himself sorely affected even before the preacher opened his lips. When John Summerfield, the young Methodist preacher who died on the threshold of his earthly ministry, became animated, "it seemed as if the very breathings of the Spirit were upon him." It is impossible to estimate too highly the power of a sympathy which draws its strength not from transient emotion so much as from the minister's conviction that in public worship he stands in the pulpit in behalf of Christ to beseech men to be reconciled to God. The spirit as much as the words of such a preacher, his manner as much as his message, carries a subduing power. What Vinet said of another, and what was eminently true of himself, is what we should all desire to have true of ourselves, "His manner of preaching did more than confute doubts, it absorbed them." Nor, in dealing with this subject of pulpit manner, should we omit all mention of minor matters, inferior indeed in importance to this power of sympathy, and yet well worthy of our consideration. The preacher's manner should be appropriate. It should be in keeping with the particular part of the service which he is conducting. Avoid the monotony of tone

which makes you uniformly employ the same key, whether in announcing a hymn, reading the Bible, engaging in prayer, or delivering the sermon. Do not give notice of a Sunday-school picnic with the same impressiveness of manner and emphasis with which you invite the congregation to pray. Even in preaching it is to be remembered that each subject of which you treat must have its appropriate manner, tone, and spirit.

"Always," is Spurgeon's counsel to his students, "suit your voice to your matter, and above all, in everything be natural." To the same effect he says elsewhere: "Vary the tone of your voice often; be like the weather, have sun, sleet, rain, then dry up; anything but fog."

(4) If you are in sympathy with your theme and with your hearers this will ensure another essential to which I will refer: I mean reverence. As we have seen, the first impression which the minister makes may affect the influence which he exerts on his congregation in higher matters, and almost decide not his fate alone—which is of less consequence—but the fate of his message. The secular air is scarcely less offensive than is the opposite extreme of sanctimoniousness. In our resolve to avoid the one we should be on our guard lest we fall into the other. Our protest against sacerdotalism, ritual, and superstition must not be suffered to weaken the reasonable and seemly reverence with which we should perform our work. The church is a building set apart for

sacred uses; the pulpit is not a secular platform; the Bible is like no other book; and worship is a peculiar act.

The observed of all observers, the minister needs to pay some attention to such secondary matters as the expression of his countenance, the posture which he assumes in repose, and his guarded behavior while conducting the service. Garrick, who whispered to his companion when they were hearing Whitefield, "I'd give all the money of a benefit-night could I handle my handkerchief as that fellow does," once criticised a clergyman who had none of Whitefield's grace of manner after this practical fashion:

"What particular business had you to do," he inquired of the offending minister, "when the duty was over?"

"None," said the other.

"I thought you had, on seeing you enter the reading desk in such a hurry. Nothing can be more indecent than to see a clergyman set about sacred business as if he were a tradesman, and go into church as if he wanted to get out of it as soon as possible. What books were those which you had before you?"

"Only the Bible and Prayer Book."

"'Only the Bible and Prayer Book.' Why you tossed them backward and forward, turned the leaves as carelessly as if they were those of a day-book and ledger."

Charles Dickens in his description of a sermon to which he listened in a theatre in the East End of London says, that while nothing could be better than the large Christianity of the preacher's general tone, yet it did some violence to his own

spirit of reverence "to see the Bible held out at arm's length at frequent intervals, and soundingly slapped like a slow lot at a sale." Such criticisms as these are valuable because they help us to see ourselves as others see us, and because they give expression to the feelings of many in our congregations who nevertheless submit to offenses against good taste and even reverence without remonstrance. They are convinced of the sincerity of their pastor and are benefited by his ministrations, but did they care to speak they might in all frankness employ Cæsar's words about Mark Antony:

> I do not much
> Dislike the matter, but the manner of his speech.

(5) It may be well to add that in the delivery of the sermon the preacher should aim to be self-possessed and calm. In the early part of his discourse he may occasionally pause with advantage. It is the practised speaker who understands and employs the eloquence of the pause; in our first efforts we very likely dread the silence which may be felt, and fear lest to ourselves and to others it may suggest that it is the speechlessness of exhaustion rather than of self-command. It is still uncertain whether Doctor Chalmers employed his usual urbanity when he said to a young preacher: "I like your sermon; you will make a good preacher; the pauses especially were magnificent." However this may have been, there can be no question that whether his speaking rate be

slow or rapid, whether he drive his sentences with tireless speed from the first to the final word, or checks his rhetoric now and again to give his hearers time to rest and reflect, the preacher should never lose that measure of self-possession which is essential to effective speech. In the passages which are concerned only with calm statement, in those parts which are devoted to tracing the logical sequence of a train of thought, and even when climbing to the height of his great argument, he reasons of righteousness and judgment to come, the pulpit orator should aim to resemble the river—

> Though deep, yet clear ; though gentle, yet not dull ;
> Strong without rage ; without o'erflowing, full.

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON
—Continued

SUMMARY

I. Does not Carry the Weight and Authority of Scripture.

II. Has few Historical Precedents to which it can Appeal.

III. Is Philosophically Objectionable.

1. Produces a sense of separation and distance.
2. A sense of unreality follows.

IV. Has no Rhetorical Parallels. Gesture and Expression Suffer.

V. Is Untrue to the Ideal of Preaching.

VI. Yet there may be Reasons for Adopting it.

1. In the preacher himself: (1) May lack the oratorical temperament; (2) May be over-fluent.
2. In the theme of the sermon.
3. In the character of the exercise.

VII. Counsels if this Method be Adopted.

1. Cultivate a style suitable to spoken discourse.
2. Pay much attention to composition.
3. Master the manuscript.
4. Read well.

Summary and Conclusion.

Note—As to the memorized sermon:

Of two kinds. Great names no reason for our adopting this method. What can be said in its favor? Open to serious objections. Of all methods, the least to be recommended.

XX

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

In considering the various ways in which a sermon may be delivered, we deal, first, with the practice of reading from a manuscript. This method presupposes that the sermon has been carefully written, and that it is carefully read. What can be said about it, for and against?

The Read Sermon

I. That it does not carry the weight and authority of Scripture sanction may be granted at once. The conception of the sermon as we have it now, dates from a period so much later than the last words of the New Testament, that we must not be surprised at this; nor must we sweepingly condemn the read discourse because when Elijah burst in on Ahab with his brief message, or Jonah went through the streets of Nineveh announcing its impending doom, or John the Baptist cried in the wilderness of Judea, or Jesus taught by the waters of Galilee, or Peter rang out his first sermon in Jerusalem, or Paul spoke to the men of Athens on Mars Hill, no manuscript was used. Under similar circumstances to-day no manuscript would be used. Yet it is certainly worthy of our consideration that nowhere in the Bible is it re-

corded that a discourse was read; and that when the apostles received their commission to go and teach all nations, there is no evidence that it was in the mind of Him in whose name through all the ages repentance and remission of sins should be preached, that this should be done by means of a read sermon.

II. The habit of reading a sermon has few historical precedents to which it can appeal. There is no evidence that it was practised by the orators of Greece and Rome. The early church seems to have known nothing of it. "All the examples of Christian antiquity are against the practice of the reading of written sermons. Neither Basil nor Chrysostom, neither Augustine, nor Luther, nor Calvin, nor their contemporaries, read their discourses." [1] The custom probably dates from the days of conflict between the friars and the early Protestant Reformers, when feeling ran so high that royal authority had to be appealed to in order to curb the excesses of controversial speech. It is certain that in 1548 Calvin wrote to Protector Somerset, of England, insisting that lively preaching was much needed, and adds: "I say this, sire, because it seems to me that there is little of preaching in the kingdom, but that sermons are for the most part read." In earlier and darker days books of homilies had been compiled to be read in churches when the priest was unable to make sermons for himself; and the homilies, which

[1] Coquerel, "*Observations pratiques sur la Prédication*," p. 175.

were prepared in the reign of Edward VI., were prepared partly that they might be read to the people by such as were not licensed to preach, and partly in order to secure uniformity of doctrine at a time when there was so much difference of opinion on the part of the clergy. Charles II., who had probably learned to admire the freedom of the continental preachers, issued an ordinance against "the present supine and slothful way of preaching," and made the reading of sermons almost an act of treason by declaring that the practice "took its beginning from the disorders of the late times." That the Puritans should read their sermons was almost inevitable.[1] The inordinate length, the tedious multiplying of subdivisions, as well as the careful doctrinal definitions which characterized them, must have almost obliged the use of a manuscript. Yet even among them there was a strong difference of opinion on this matter, and John Cotton, who in two days could preach three sermons six hours long, stoutly maintained that "reading was not preaching."[2] No doubt it was through the Puritans that the practice of reading sermons came into New England. Neither in Great Britain nor in America has it been the method of the majority of useful and successful preachers. If the great name of Thomas Chalmers be appealed to in its defense, it is sufficient to answer that he

[1] W. M. Taylor, D. D., "The Scottish Pulpit," pp. 248, 249.

[2] John Brown, D. D., "The Pilgrim Fathers of New England," p. 310.

who can read as Chalmers did—in tones of enthusiasm that made the rafters roar, hanging over his audience, menacing them with his shaking fist or standing erect, manacled and staring—can be suffered to do as he pleases. And if reference be made to Jonathan Edwards, it may further be affirmed that even when he was preaching his great sermons he did not always read, and that in his later years he abandoned the manuscript altogether.[1] What is remarkable, the preachers who have been in the habit of reading have not, as a rule, preferred the method; and treatises on homiletics, written by those who in the pulpit are slaves to the paper, have rather commended extemporaneous preaching. "Henceforth," Chalmers wrote in his journal after hearing Andrew Fuller preach, "let me try to extemporize in the pulpit." "I heard," says C. G. Finney, "a theological teacher read a sermon on the importance of extemporaneous preaching. His views on the subject were correct, but his practice entirely contradicted them." [2]

III. That the sermon should be read is, further, philosophically objectionable. Between the speaker and hearer it interposes a paper which, except in very rare cases, such as that of Dr. Chalmers, produces two evils.

1. A sense of separation and distance. Mr.

[1] Allen, "Life of Edwards," p. 41.

[2] Cf. "Yale Lectures on Preaching," Dr. Dale, p. 163; Phillips Brooks, p. 171; W. M. Taylor, D. D., "Scottish Pulpit," p. 232.

Blaine told a company of ministers at the Congregational Club in Boston, that when they put the nonconductor of a pile of manuscript between themselves and their hearers, they were not preaching the gospel, "you are only reading it." Dr. R. S. Storrs abandoned his written sermon when he had to address the throngs in the Academy of Music, Brooklyn, for this same reason. "Inserting a manuscript between the audience and myself would have been like cutting the telegraph wires and putting a sheet of paper into the gap." [1]

2. A sense of unreality naturally follows this sense of separation and distance. The conviction that the message is with authority, which is absolutely necessary alike with preacher and hearers if the sermon is to do its best work, is very faint, and often, indeed, it is absent altogether unless the speaker is in close, conscious touch with his congregation. Rowland Hill had reason to gibe at the impotence of "dried tongues." Many will agree with Spurgeon when he says, "The best reading I have ever heard has tasted of paper, and has stuck in my throat," and the conclusion of Dr. Joseph Parker is still more worthy of being laid to heart by every preacher: "Having tried both methods, the method of free speech and the method of reading, I can give an opinion founded upon experience, and I now give it as entirely favorable to free speech. The pulpit will never take its

[1] "Preaching Without Notes," p. 34. See also "Our Sermons," R. Gee, p. 235.

proper place until the habit of reading sermons on ordinary occasions is entirely abandoned; it is official, pedantic, heartless, and ought to be put down."

IV. Let it be remembered again that the practice of reading in the pulpit has no rhetorical parallel. The lawyer in court, the political speaker on the platform, the actor on the stage, do not read. "The practice of reading sermons" Blair considered to be "one of the greatest obstacles to eloquence." "Elocutionists may read," a Southern preacher says, "but orators never." Of what invaluable allies in effective speaking the habit of reading deprives a preacher. Gesture is crippled and contracted, and becomes tame and monotonous. The perfection of the art of gesture among the Italians and other nations which naturally possess it in fuller measure than do we, can make even "their legs the emblems of their various thought." To this extreme we may not wish to go, but still less can we hold with Dr. Samuel Johnson that "action can have no effect upon reasonable minds"; and that "in proportion as men are removed from brutes, action will have less influence on them." Then again, the facial expression of the preacher who reads his sermons is almost wholly if not entirely lost. The lips, which should never be concealed by the mustache, the pose of the head, the varied expression of the eye, can now do little. The eye is a most powerful auxiliary to the voice. Our Lord and his apostles

used it for this purpose. Why should we forfeit a faculty which comes to us sanctioned by such high uses? John McNeill is justified in calling the attention of his hearers to the phrase, "Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John," and reminding them that "this could not have been done if they had read their little sermon. That exchange of looks may have decided the man to accept the muscular arm of the fisherman apostle. Is not this a lesson to preachers? They cannot fasten their eyes both on the audience and 'the paper.'" This power of the eye has always been great in secular oratory; why shall it be less so in the case of those who occupy the throne of eloquence, the pulpit? By his opponents the glance of William Pitt was as much dreaded as was his voice. Robespierre, it has been truly said, could quell the French Assembly by his lion eye; while that of Daniel Webster was a gateway out of which marched conquest. Dr. Thomas Guthrie held that the objection to "the paper lay deep in the feelings of our nature." These are his words about reading a sermon, and they well deserve to be heeded: "It universally produces more or less of monotony, so much of it as to act like mesmerism on the audience. To keep an audience wide awake, their attention active and on stretch (without which, how are they to get good?), all the natural varieties of tone and action are necessary —qualifications incompatible with the practice of reading."

V. Assuredly to adopt the habit of reading the sermon is to be untrue to the ideal of preaching. The sermon is a familiar talk, dignified and yet easy, on the highest of all themes. It aims to produce immediate results, and consequently in times of quickened religious feeling the addresses are almost without exception spoken, not read. The American audiences of the last century, accustomed to a ministry addicted to closely written manuscripts held in the hand and often near to the eyes, were stirred to a passion of enthusiasm by the preaching of Whitefield, "who seemed to pour forth his torrent of apparently unpremeditated eloquence without fatigue or study." [1] To Whitefield the gathering thunderstorm, which would have obliterated the manuscript, was only another power to be pressed into the service. He invoked the tempest and wielded the lightning with such tremendous power that men and women fell under the power of words which were emphasized by the fires of heaven. To sum up: The preacher may very well hesitate before deliberately choosing a method of delivery which has no authority in Scripture, and scarcely a precedent in the great days of the pulpit; for which no parallel can be found in other fields of oratory; and which tends to arrest the power of sympathy between him and his hearers, to weaken the sermon in its appointed mission to produce immediately an impression, and

[1] G. S. Walker, D. D., "Some Aspects of the Religious Life of New England," p. 92.

to deny to the speaker the aid of passing incidents which may be arrows of conviction in the hands of the Lord.

VI. Notwithstanding these serious objections to reading, there may yet seem to be reasons why in certain cases it should be adopted. At these we will now glance.

1. Some of them may be found in the preacher himself.

(1) It is possible that he may lack the oratorical temperament. With Bourdaloue he may not dare look his audience in the face; with Cardinal Newman his felicity of diction may fail him when he drops his pen. In such a case Spurgeon's counsel, "Brother, write if you have not the gift of free speech, and yet are fitted to instruct," will be seasonable. Nor should it be denied that the preacher who dispenses with a manuscript will have to suffer for it. The perfect self-control of so practised a preacher as John Angell James, of Birmingham, England, gave no hint of the fact,[1] to which his biographer testifies, that for many years he scarcely ever slept on a Saturday night, so uncontrollable was the apprehension with which he looked forward to the services of the Sunday. "Why shouldn't I read?" he asked of his colleague when he was anticipating having to deliver a sermon before the London Missionary Society. "Because you are never so effective when you read," was the reply. "Well, now," Mr. James answered, "I'll

[1] "Life and Letters of J. A. James," by R. W. Dale, p. 275.

tell you how it is. If I preach without reading I shall be miserable for three weeks, miserable till I am in the pulpit; if I read, I shall be quite happy till I begin to preach, though I shall be miserable till I finish."[1] It is sufficient to say on this point that immunity from suffering is not essential to a preacher's work, and that although in his resolve to speak without a manuscript he may have to work hard during the week, to rise early on Sunday morning, and to endure the pangs of anticipation and the penalties of reaction, yet he will be in the end stronger and more efficient for the effort. The cases are probably rare in which by determination and perseverance even the most diffident of preachers cannot dispense with his paper, and benefit alike himself and congregation by doing so.

(2) On the other hand, are there not preachers who by reason of a dangerous fluency of speech would do well to write and sometimes to read? Dr. Dale, to whom reference has just been made, explained his invariable habit of reading in this way: "If I spoke extemporaneously I should never sit down." To Mr. Binney, at one time the most popular preacher in London, an old Scotchwoman frankly said: "I am aye glad to see the papers, for when ye take them oot and lay them on the buik, I say to mysel', 'We'll ha'e a deal mair sense the day.'"

2. The theme of the sermon, again, may seem

[1] R. W. Dale, "Yale Lectures," pp. 156, 157.

to demand exhaustive treatment and therefore to justify the preacher in reading his discourse. And yet even here it may fairly be questioned whether a congregation can profit by a line of thought which a preacher cannot pursue without the use of notes. The preacher's own ability to master, vitalize, and deliver truth must certainly be superior to the ability of his hearers, unprepared by training or forethought, to receive and digest what he has made ready.

3. A justification of reading is also found by some of its advocates in the very character of the exercise. Preaching, they urge, necessitates composition, and the demands of composition, and especially of composition dealing with religion, call for accuracy and finish. In this there is no doubt a measure of force. It may be granted at once that not only is the best extempore speech likely to be marred by grammatical blunders, but, what is a far more serious matter, truth of the first importance may suffer from loose and hasty definition. As to our composition, however, we must learn not to be too fastidious. We must not allow ourselves to be slaves to moods and tenses, and to dread a slip in syntax as though it were the unpardonable sin. As to the need for careful definition of truths of the first moment, we are one with the advocate of reading sermons; our contention is not for impromptu speech, but only for such a method of delivery as shall do the utmost justice to thought carefully prepared in the study.

VII. Should the preacher conclude, after honestly trying all other methods, that for him it is best to read his sermons, we may offer the following counsels:

1. Cultivate a style suitable for spoken discourse. Let it have the freedom and force of vernacular address. Speak your sentences aloud in your study before you write them down. Let the fresh air of open day blow through them lest they smell too much of the lamp.

2. Remember that errors in composition which would be quite pardonable in a spoken address are unpardonable when the address is read. The plain-spoken Scotch elder objected to his minister's sermon—first, because it was read; secondly, because he did not read it well; and thirdly, "because it was not worth readin' at a'." How few read sermons, which by the character of their thought or their composition, seem worth the pains which have been taken in writing them out in full.

3. Train yourself in the free and unfettered use of a full manuscript. To do this means giving almost as much time to becoming familiar with the composition which you propose to read as is given to it by him who first writes and then lays aside his paper before going into the pulpit.[1] A skillful preacher of the present day warns the young preacher that "he will never command his congregation if he cannot command his paper."[2]

[1] Taylor, "Yale Lectures," p. 157.
[2] R. Gee, "Our Sermons," p. 239.

Preach not from but through your manuscript, as Chalmers did.[1]

4. Spare no pains to make yourself a good reader. It by no means follows that should you read your sermons your hearers will not detect the lack of the oratorical temperament and the presence of natural timidity. Attend to your voice, to its tone and flexibility and emphasis. Charles Dickens learned all his public readings by heart,[2] and knew every word of them without needing to look at the open book which lay on the desk before him. Yet in the anticipation of an engagement, he says that he read over the selections often twice a day "with exactly the same pains as at night." Mindful that what is known as clerical sore throat is much more frequent with those who read their sermons than with those who use no manuscript, it will be wise for you to attend to position and gesture. An eminent surgeon avers that the malady is caused by the habit of hanging the head. "The speaker who directs his remarks to the buttons of his waistcoat is almost certain to have a sore throat. Clergymen's heads ought never to be hanged."

So much may be said by way of counsel; but we say it with the proviso that under ordinary circumstances this is the last method which the preacher should adopt permanently. To read may be the wiser course to pursue for the preacher

[1] Taylor, "The Scottish Pulpit," p. 181.
[2] "Charles Dickens' Life," by Forster, p. 350.

who, while he has fullness of thought and grace of language, lacks the oratorical temperament, and consequently falls very much below the level of his own natural abilities when he dispenses with a manuscript. In nearly every other instance we advise against it. An age of effective preachers is likely to be an age of preachers who do not read. The decadence of the pulpit will be marked by a return to this "supine and slothful way of preaching," which should never be adopted without conscientious and prayerful consideration of the preacher's duty to his Master and to the world.

Better perhaps here than anywhere else, we may refer to the memorized sermon, in which either the words are committed to memory without being written down, sentence after sentence being composed and learned, or the words are first written out in full and then the sermon is verbally memorized. The second method is the more common, but neither of them can be commended to the ordinary preacher. Because Robert Hall inwardly elaborated his great sermons in the very words in which they were delivered, or because Thomas Guthrie never entered the pulpit without having first written and then committed his, no precedent is furnished for us. On account of his acute suffering, Robert Hall was compelled to refrain from much writing; and Thomas Guthrie inherited the traditions of the Scotch pulpit, which laid under the strictest ban the use of the paper in the pulpit.

No one will question that when the sermon is

well memorized, the method combines to a rare degree finish with power, and it is certain that, since the work of committing presupposes careful preparation in addition to the task of acquiring the composition, the preacher who does this will be free from the charge of indolence or superficiality. The objections to memorizing are, however, very serious. Committing to memory is largely a mechanical process, and it is evident, therefore, that the higher faculties are suppressed rather than stimulated, and the heaviest strain falls upon the inferior ability to remember words. The full and vivid processes of immediate thought are necessarily arrested, the preacher dreads nothing so much as spontaneity, and shuts the door of his mind against a fresh idea as resolutely as the door of the ark was shut against the flood. However perfectly it be done, the method is only another form of reading. An invisible paper is present to the eye of the preacher, and he is really reading off its contents, line by line and page by page. If, on the other hand, it be ill done, an audience becomes painfully conscious of the effort which the preacher is putting forth to grasp at the eluding word, and half dreads, half hopes for a collapse. Meanwhile, the fervor and freedom of true eloquence are conspicuous only by their absence.

No method can be recommended which precludes the sudden suggestion of word or thought, and by so doing binds the truth and, to use the

Scottish phrase, "stints the Spirit." Of all methods, memorizing seems to us to be the one least to be recommended. Rare powers of memory combined with rare rhetorical gifts may justify its use. Otherwise it is to be avoided.

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON
—Continued

SUMMARY

I. Definition of the Term "Extemporaneous."

1. Not impromptu preaching.
2. Implies special fitness: (1) Health; (2) Intellectual alertness.
3. Allows some amount of preparation: (1) The subject to be mastered beforehand; (2) Words and even phrases sometimes composed; (3) A preparation of the heart.

II. Merits of the Extemporaneous Method.

1. It is natural.
2. It is convenient.
3. It is rhetorically excellent.

III. Cautions and Counsels.

1. Must not be adopted under any misconception: (1) That it has the sanction of great names; (2) That it is the easiest method. Beware of mental and moral deterioration.
2. Keep the mind well stored and trained to accuracy.
3. Constantly practise composition.
4. Make careful rhetorical preparation.
5. Discipline yourself in composure.
6. Make good use of your preparation. How? (1) Preparation may be entirely mental; (2) A brief may be prepared, but not used; (3) A brief may be prepared and carried into the pulpit.

Concluding Summary.

XXI

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

THERE is so much confusion as to the meaning of the term "extemporaneous," and especially as it is applied to sermons, that we must before proceeding any further come to a clear understanding on this point.

The Extemporaneous Sermon

I. An extemporaneous sermon may be defined as one in which the preacher knows what he is going to say, but not how he is going to say it.[1] In happy moments the words seem to come as if by instinct, but there are other times when the swift intuitions of the instant fail, and it is this uncertainty which makes the sermons of the extemporaneous preacher so uneven.[2]

1. Let it be understood at once that extemporaneous preaching is not the same as impromptu preaching. As to this we need say little, and that little only in condemnation. To the Quaker who told Richard Baxter that he never studied what he said, the reply was, "Then I less marvel at thy nonsense." Chalmers called such preaching "a mere gurgle of syllables"; and when a lady

[1] Ath. Coquerel.

[2] John Foster, "Life and Correspondence," p. 33.

praised an impromptu preacher to Archbishop Magee, saying, "Oh, what a saint in the pulpit," his retort was, "And, oh, what a martyr in the pew." "My lord," a clergyman once boasted to his bishop, "when I go up the steps of the pulpit I never know the subject of my sermon"; and the bishop answered him, "No, and I hear that your congregation does not when you come down."

There may indeed be times when, between us and the discourse which we have prepared, a will higher than our own seems evidently to interpose another message. In the ministry of Fletcher of Madeley, and in the revival services of C. G. Finney, there came such experiences, and invariably the sequel explained why the change had to be made. But these times will be infrequent. As a rule the Spirit honors the preacher who devoutly prepares his sermon beforehand.

2. Extemporaneous preaching to be effective implies special fitness. The speaker should enjoy good physical health and a fine digestion. He should be endowed with intellectual alertness, and a readiness to see and catch points as they present themselves. The famous "Conferences" of Lacordaire were rapidly prepared, but while he worked the intellectal effort was intense. Dr. A. Alexander used to say that if he had to stake his life on a single effort he would, if familiar with the general subject, abandon himself entirely to the impulse of the moment. The tremendous importance of the issue would brace all his powers to

their utmost.[1] The opinion of Dr. Kirk, himself one of the most effective of extemporaneous speakers, is of value; and he says that in order to success the preacher who adopts this method needs a full mind, a glowing heart, and a relentless purpose to secure practical results.[2]

3. Extemporaneous preaching allows some amount of preparation.

(1) By previous study the general lines of the subject must have been mastered as completely as though the whole had been written. The only secret (so Archbishop Magee told his clergy) is to burn the subject into the brain until out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. Daniel Webster opened his large eyes when he was asked about speeches of his which were said to have been delivered on the spur of the moment or at brief notice, and uttered a sentence which deserves to be written in letters of gold: "Young man, there is no such thing as extemporaneous acquisition." So another orator, Wendell Phillips, counsels, "Think out your subjects carefully. Read all you can relative to them. Fill your mind, and then talk simply and naturally." And Dr. Joseph Parker, who himself does not read his sermons, says: "There is only one thing I am more afraid of than extemporaneous speaking, and that is, extemporaneous thinking."

(2) Indeed, the preparation may be carried so far that certain words may be chosen and even sen-

[1] Dr. A. Alexander, "Life," pp. 84, 87. [2] "Life," p. 42.

tences composed. A theological definition, for example, should never be left at the mercy of extemporaneous selection.

(3) Certainly in no other method of delivery is the preparation of the heart so important. In a memorable crisis in the debates of the Westminster Assembly the learning of Selden, then the greatest lawyer in England, had been employed to demolish the hopes of the Evangelical party, and apparently he had completely succeeded. Then Samuel Rutherford turned to young Gillespie, the hope of Scottish orthodoxy, and said, "Rise, George man, and defend the church which Christ hath purchased with his own blood." Gillespie did rise, and so powerfully did he speak that when he sat down Selden turned to a friend and said, "That young man has swept away the learning and the labor of ten years of my life." When Gillespie's note book was seized upon by his brethren so that at least the outlines of this triumphant speech might be preserved, all they found were these three words, *Da lucem, Domine,* "Give light, O Lord." Such critical moments come to all preachers, did they but know it; and at such times it is the heart of Gillespie and not the intellect of Selden that prevails.

II. What are the merits of the extemporaneous method? We mention three points in its favor.

1. It is natural. To become artificial and formal in style is the danger of him who writes. The extemporaneous speaker is likely to escape this fault,

and to be obedient to Augustine's maxim, "Let not the preacher become the servant of words; rather let words be servants of the speaker." The glance of the eye, the free motion of the arms, the gestures with the hand, the poise and play of the whole body—all these help the extemporaneous preacher to make the most of himself.

2. Undoubtedly also it is convenient. Mr. Spurgeon prepared his Sunday morning sermon on Saturday evening, working with great intensity while he worked, and pressing into his service all the resources of a fine library. His evening sermon was prepared on Sunday afternoon. This allowed him time for other work connected with his great church.

3. Moreover, it is rhetorically excellent. Extemporaneous speech is, as Quintilian says, "the crown and radiance of all eloquence." The speaker, if in a happy mood, is stimulated to achievements which surprise himself. Masterful moments come to him when he knows himself to be equal to the emergency, when rare and fitting words appear at command, when trains of thought marshal themselves at his bidding, and when the truth glows with the passion of his vigorous conception and burns its way into the hearts of those who listen to him. When a lady who was a member of Robert Hall's church at Leicester was reading to him her notes of one of his discourses, he interrupted her with the inquiry, "Did I say that, madam? I did not know I had ever said

anything so fine." "What would I not do or suffer to buy that ability?" wrote Emerson, after listening to a facile extemporaneous speaker. But, then, as Emerson wisely adds, "To each his own." We may readily grant that Quintillian's estimate is a true one. Undoubtedly extemporaneous speech is the highest form of address. But let us beware before we adopt it as our own constant practice. The heights to which this method lifts us may usually be very lofty, but the depths to which it sometimes sinks us are well-nigh unfathomable; and too often the level on which we finally settle is nearer to the second extreme than to the first. Dean Farrar is probably correct when he says, "It is certain that not one man in a thousand has the requisite gifts to preach in this manner." [1]

III. Some cautions and counsels will be in place here.

1. And first, I would urge the young preacher not to adopt the extemporaneous method under any mistaken conception.

(1) Without question it has the sanction of great names. But such preachers as Chrysostom and Latimer and Whitefield and Spurgeon do not give us the measure of the ordinary ministry.

(2) Nor should we decide on this method because it is the easiest. There is a deep meaning in the old phrase, "The duty and discipline of extemporary preaching," and Richard Baxter, among the most conscientious of men, has left us his sig-

[1] "Contemporary Review," Nov., 1896, p. 627.

nificant confession: "I use notes as much as any man when I take pains, and as little as any man when I am lazy or busy and have no time to prepare." "Never begin to preach without notes," says Dr. R. S. Storrs, "with any idea of saving yourselves work by it; if you do, you will fail, and you will richly deserve to fail."[1]

The danger of deterioration in the character of his work is greater in the case of the extemporaneous speaker than in the case of any other. Unconsciously to himself he comes to limit his vocabulary to certain words and phrases, and as the years go on he fails to maintain the high standard with which he started. Perhaps unconsciously to himself, he accepts the lower level as the more convenient. There is also great risk that he will fall into habits of exaggeration, and lavish his superlatives on inferior subjects. Be on your guard, therefore, against fluent mediocrity. With yet greater emphasis we would say, Beware of the moral deterioration which threatens the extemporaneous speaker. Froude held that men of high sincerity seldom speak well, because they are too careful about truth, and know "how difficult it is to adhere to it in rapid and excited delivery." Avoid unmeaning expansion and the reckless use of words which neither add new ideas nor emphasize those which have already been expressed. And if you resolve to speak extemporaneously, see to it that the illustrations which you employ

[1] Storrs, "Preaching Without Notes," p. 38.

are fresh. Keep clear of the stock ancedotes and stories which form the staple of ready-made collections, and of lines of poetry which because they are good for all occasions are therefore not good for any.

2. In order to do full justice to the distinction between saying something and having something to say, it will be necessary for the extemporaneous preacher to keep his mind well stored with facts and to train it to accuracy in the expression of them. Mere readiness can never take the place of these.[1] "No man could ever speak extempore if everything he said was literally the fruit of the moment." If Beecher devoted only a short time to the actual preparation of a discourse, it needs to be remembered about him that he had a wonderfully accurate memory for facts, and that he lived in the atmosphere of sermon making. Archbishop Magee's advice to a brother clergyman is much to the point: "Master your subject, rule number one; master yourself, rule number two; put one idea into your sermon, and as many thoughts as you can; and when you have worked that idea out you ought to be able to give your sermon unaided. Unless you can, it is a bad sermon."

3. Constantly practise composition. Robert Hall, although prevented by his physical infirmity from using his own pen very much, insists that a man will speak well in proportion as he has written

[1] See Dr. J. W. Alexander, "Thoughts on Preaching."

much. The reason for this is obvious. It is no easy matter to couple mental exactness to verbal exactness. In the rush of unprepared speech it is hard to avoid over-statement or under-statement. Always to choose the proper word, and to build it into the sentences in the proper place, is an achievement which baffles even the practised speaker. One of John Bright's most pathetic passages—the peroration of his speech on the Crimean War—trembled at one moment on the verge of bathos because the right word did not immediately occur to him. A keen observer who frequently listened to Wendell Phillips testifies that with all that orator's wonderful command of good English, he never heard him make but one speech which was not marred by decided grammatical blunders. "Nothing that I say in public," Spurgeon declared, "is fit to be printed as I say it." In advising young preachers to learn how to speak without notes, Dr. R. S. Storrs is careful to insist upon writing. "Only careful writing separates, signalizes, infixes the richer and remoter words in the mind. We pass over them as we read. We seek them out with the pen." [1]

4. Not satisfied with writing in order to enrich and fortify your vocabulary, you must, further, make careful elocutionary preparation. Not the language which you use, but also the way in which you use it should be considered. Words can no more be separated from speech in preaching than

[1] "Preaching Without Notes," p. 47.

can the shot be separated from the cannon in artillery. Study the carrying capacity of the vowels; the effect of words as they are spoken; their majesty and melody; their power and pathos; their effect in soothing or stimulating the mind. Whitefield, it is said, could do what he pleased with an audience with the word "Mesopotamia"; and Robert Hall could never utter the word "tear" without a disposition to weep, which was shared by his hearers.

5. Magee's insistence that the speaker must master himself, suggests that the speaker must discipline himself in composure and self-possession. He must accustom himself to meet interruption at all events with outward serenity. Erskine, the most popular advocate of his day, broke down before indifference; and to the lawyer who was associated with him in one case he exclaimed, "Who do you think can get on with that wet blanket of a face of yours before him?" The preacher is happy indeed if his gaze never meets the lack-luster gaze, or the eye which is closed. Let him reflect that the stolid features may conceal deeper feeling than he gives them credit for, and that even though some member of his congregation sleep, perhaps he does well. A falling handkerchief, a wandering fly, a fainting woman, or the baby, which is not infrequently brought to the front seat by its proud mother, and is apt to cry at any moment, these are among the minor annoyances against which the speaker needs to be

proof. Only time and practice can train him to be superior to them; and it must be confessed that in the case of many preachers even time and practice fail to insure him invariable self-possession.

6. As a last point we advise the extemporaneous preacher to make the best possible use of his preparation. Three ways of doing this may be mentioned.

(1) The first is to use no notes at all. In the dark lanes around Cambridge young Spurgeon practised his early sermons, on his way to the villages where he was to preach. "I do not mean that I ever repeated a single sentence from memory, but I thought my lesson over while on my legs, and then worked it into my very soul." The practice of many extemporaneous preachers seems to be summed up in Doctor Hook's prescription, "Think about what you have to say, and then say it, in as clear and vigorous a way as you can."

(2) A second plan is to prepare a brief, but not to carry it into the pulpit. The purpose which it serves in this case is to impress on the mind and preserve in the memory the sequence of thought. Doctor Storrs held this kind of preparation of so much importance that he says: "If needful I would write the plan of the sermon over twenty times before preaching; not copying merely from one piece of paper upon another, but writing it out carefully and fully, each time independently,

till I perfectly knew it; till it was fixed absolutely in the mind." [1]

(3) A third plan is not only to prepare a brief, but also to carry it into the pulpit for use. This was the practice of F. W. Robertson, but he rarely used more written notes than could be penciled upon a small slip of paper. Even this was speedily dispensed with. "Before ten minutes had gone by it was crushed to uselessness in his grasp, for he knit his fingers together over it, as he knit his words over his thoughts." By Bishop Wilberforce the brief was probably used as little. A brother prelate relates that, on one occasion, after hearing the great orator describe the effect on the soul of the clearing away of intellectual doubts, he begged to be allowed to see the passage in the manuscript. "The bishop put the document into his hand, turned to the page which contained the passage inquired after, and showed him a blank sheet of paper, inscribed with the single word "fog." He preferred he said to carry this manuscript into the pulpit—it frequently lay on the desk before him upside down—for the benefit of the younger clergy. "I am afraid of their beginning to preach extempore before they are able to do so with advantage to their hearers." [2] But it is safe to surmise that there was another reason. The notes, however brief and however little used, gave him confidence as he spoke. A famous Presbyterian

[1] "Preaching Without Notes," pp. 116, 117.
[2] "Life of Bishop Wilberforce," p. 371.

preacher of the last generation[1] was accustomed to write only a few hints for his sermon on a slip of paper which he invariably placed under the thumb of his left hand. On one occasion, when the little brief slipped off and sailed away to the floor of the middle aisle of the church where he was preaching, he maintained his self-possession, "tore a small piece from a newspaper in his pocket, placed it under his thumb, and went on with his discourse, gathering from it apparently the same inspiration." All men are not so happily constituted, and the ordinary preacher who uses a brief or notes will do well to prepare his notes with care; to write them in a clear and legible hand; to see that they are well placed on the open Bible, and not to trust to a chance newspaper for deliverance in case of accident, lest all such expedients prove vain, and his sermon resemble the blank sheet with the one ominous word in Bishop Wilberforce's manuscript. He will do well too to keep himself from being the slave of any habit which is a help only in seeming to furnish the appearance of it.

We may sum up as to the extemporaneous sermon by saying, that while it has been the method used by some of the greatest of preachers—men who have possessed richness of thought, clearness of intellectual perception, fervor and fullness of expression, and the natural and acquired graces of the true orator—yet it is an exceedingly dangerous method for the majority of preachers, especially

[1] Dr. John Blair Smith.

for those, and their name is legion, who have more language than thought. Certainly, of all methods of delivery it is the one which produces the most unequal results. To it belong the most triumphant achievements of the pulpit, and also its most humiliating defeats.

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON
—Continued

SUMMARY

DEFINITION. Full and careful preparation, combined with free delivery.

I. FULL AND CAREFUL PREPARATION.

1. The rhetorical order: (1) The conception of ideas; (2) Their arrangement in logical order; (3) Their expression in fitting language.
2. Advantages of writing: (1) It gives exactness of expression; (2) It gives literary finish; (3) Rhetorical efficiency: (*a*) Writing will impress the language on the mind; (*b*) And will give the preacher a working vocabulary.

NOTE—(*a*) As to the time required for writing a sermon; (*b*) Points in contrast with other methods.

II. FREE DELIVERY.

Essentials to success:

1. A resolve to succeed.
2. Attention to health.
3. Regular habits of work.
4. Rhetorical preparation.
5. Pulpit experience. This will bring (1) Ease; (2) A sense of reality; (3) Freedom and vividness; (4) Accuracy.

NOTE—As to points which fail to occur in delivery. Conclusion.

This method commended:

1. Because it avoids the objections urged against other methods.
2. Because it combines the largest number of excellencies.
3. Because it furnishes a store of useful material.
4. Because it insures a tolerable level of excellence.
5. Because it does most complete justice to the work of preaching.

XXII

THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON (CONTINUED)

The Composite Method

To each one of the methods of delivering a sermon already considered there are, as we have seen, grave objections. Let it be remembered that we are in search of the best way for the largest number of preachers. That Chalmers read, and Guthrie recited, and Spurgeon extemporized, can furnish no model for the majority of us to copy. The method which we are now to consider may be commended because it is not only on the whole the most satisfactory, but also because any preacher may acquire it who is willing to take pains to do so. He who is not willing to take pains should have no place in the ministry.

The composite method we define as full and careful preparation combined with free delivery. Here, it will be noticed, there are two statements: The method demands full and careful preparation, and it also demands free delivery. With these two points we will now deal more at length.

I. Full and careful preparation is the first requisite in the composite method of delivery. In any discourse the true rhetorical order is, first, the conception of ideas; then, their orderly arrange-

ment; and finally, their expression in fitting language. Now in the preparation of a sermon to be given according to the method which we have under consideration at present, we must strenuously insist on each of these three.

1. As to the conception of ideas, let us say, By all means do justice to your high vocation. The preacher has the noblest of all subjects—religion; he has the best of handbooks—the Bible; he has at his service vast accumulations of opinion and research in commentaries and encyclopedias; and, better even than all of these, he has the distinct promise of Divine aid. Even with so many points in his favor, however, he is bound to bear in mind continually the fact that the conception of ideas must imply his own personal apprehension of them. "It is far better," as Martin Luther says, "to see with our own eyes than with other people's eyes"; and there are preachers, waterlogged on the Dead Sea of human authority, who need to lay to heart his further words: "Through so many commentaries and books the dear Bible is buried, so that the people do not look at the text itself." We repeat, that at the root of the composite method lies the imperative necessity that you make your own any ideas which you propose to use. Socrates was wont to declare that all men are eloquent enough on subjects whereon they have knowledge; and Quintilian puts the prime importance of mastering our material in his counsel, "Let there be care about words, but solicitude

about things." To a speaker who had not yet learned this first lesson in effective oratory, Pitt said: "You are more anxious about words than about ideas. You do not consider that if you are thinking of words you will have no ideas, but if you have ideas words will come of themselves." So Horace Bushnell gave it as his deliberate judgment, "that there cannot be much preaching worthy of the name where there is no thinking."

2. The ideas thus acquired must, in the next place, be arranged in logical order. Bring them into such relations the one to the other that they shall form a continuous chain. The divisions of the discourse, and the thoughts under them, should stand in their true relations. Test this by repeating to yourself the successive stages in your discourse before you have begun to compose. "Upon the truthfulness of the arrangement," says F. W. Robertson, "all depends." Now proceed to write out carefully a sermon plan embodying this line of thought. The fullness or slightness of this plan is very much a matter of personal choice, but we recommend that it be so complete that if necessary it can be carried into the pulpit and preached from without writing out the sermon.

Notice at this point, that already the composite method differs from memorizing. Special prominence is given not to the expression of the ideas but to their conception and arrangement. Instead of concerning himself chiefly with the language of the sermon which he has to commit to memory,

the preacher is most emphatically interested with its thought. "Think of your ideas," was Pitt's advice to a friend, "and let your words take care of themselves."

3. Now the preacher may pass to the expression of his ideas. The sermon may be written out in full. No doubt this practice of writing out the sermon word for word means hard and often distasteful work. "At first," says President Wayland, reviewing his early experiences, "it was intolerable labor." A joy and rapture to talk out his thought in words that flashed upon the mind at the instant, Spurgeon declared that to him "writing was the work of a slave." Yet by persevering at it, the one settled down to the conviction that the distasteful labor could be done and did it; and the other after some years found positive delight in the laborious task of serving God with his pen.[1]

(1) There are three advantages in writing in full. The first of these is that the speaker acquires exactness of expression. Writing, as Lord Bacon puts it, "makes an exact man"; and his contemporary Bishop Hall testifies that he never durst climb into the pulpit until he had penned every word of his sermon in the same order wherein he hoped to deliver it, "although in the expression I listed not to be a slave of syllables."

(2) The second advantage which comes from writing is literary finish. The careless grammar,

[1] W. Williams, "Reminiscences of C. H. Spurgeon," p. 125.

the unequal and ill-poised sentences of purely extemporaneous discourse are thus in a large measure avoided. Lord Brougham laid it down "as a rule admitting of no exception, that a man will speak well in proportion as he has written well." Spurgeon commends to his students "the frequent writing of sermons that you may be preserved from a slipshod style"; F. W. Robertson frequently wrote out on Monday the sermon preached on the previous day; and Archbishop Magee "wrote carefully and labored much," although in the pulpit he did not look at the manuscript.

(3) The third advantage in writing will be found in rhetorical efficiency, to which Quintilian probably refers when he says that only the use of the pen can make a man eloquent. To write will not only furnish you (*a*) with a vocabulary carefully selected, it will also impress these words on your mind. "Loose bind, loose find" may be annotated in the preacher's case as meaning that the words which cost him nothing in selection will play him false in his after use of them; and, on the other hand, the word which has given him pains and quickened his critical faculty in the study will be almost certain to come at his bidding in the pulpit.

(*b*) We need to do full justice, also, to the restraining influence which this habit of careful literary composition exercises on the preacher's vocabulary. He writes what he means to speak; therefore his manuscript confines itself to written

speech. He keeps himself to words and phrases which are oratorical. Dr. Hook, for many years among the foremost of English preachers, records this conviction when he says: "One of the things which makes very ordinary sermons from the pulpit tell, is this very circumstance, that I write precisely as I would talk, and that my sermons are thus as nearly as possible extemporaneous compositions." [1] "Whoever can write a real living book," exclaims Carlyle, "is he not the great preacher?" For our purpose it is fair to say that he is the great preacher who can write a real living sermon.

If we be asked as to the amount of time required for making a sermon in this way, we may reply that one morning should be spent in developing the theme and preparing a complete outline, and a second in writing out the sermon in full. It is evident that further than this no rule can be laid down with safety. A late bishop of London maintained that a man could write a sermon in three hours, or not at all. Dean Farrar requires half an hour more than this. Certainly not more than four and a half hours are needed for the whole work of writing the sermon out in full, and carefully revising it. The labor of writing is much lightened and the time of writing is much diminished by the fact that the preacher has before him his carefully prepared plan, which really represents the hard work of his pulpit preparation.

It is of the first importance that in composing

[1] "Successful Preachers," G. J. Davies, p. 141.

and writing out his sermon the preacher be entirely free from interruption. He should claim at the hands of his people the whole morning for study, and he is likely to find that his claim is more readily allowed by his congregation than it is urged by himself. From three to four hours a day of sure undisturbed work for four days in the week will, in the majority of cases, give him all the time he needs for preparing his two sermons. A sermon, in our judgment, should be written at one sitting, and if the previous study has been conscientiously performed and the plan carefully written out, the sermon is likely to be written *currente calamo.* Experience will soon teach one that work thus thrown off, has an element of superiority all its own. "Such swiftness of mere writing," says Carlyle, "after due energy of preparation, is doubtless the right method."

Thus far the process which we are commending may seem to differ only slightly if at all from that which is pursued in some other methods. And yet there is already a difference. As contrasted with the sermon written and read, the outline is likely to be more careful, and the style of composition to be better suited to spoken discourse. As contrasted with the sermon memorized from a manuscript, more attention is paid to the thought than to the language, under the persuasion that when once a thought has been put into the best language that can be found for it the mind without an effort to recall the words will be likely to

use them again when that thought has to be expressed.[1]

II. It remains for us to consider the second requisite in the composite method. This is free delivery.

In order that a sermon thus carefully prepared should be preached with all the force and freshness of an extemporaneous discourse, what is needed?

1. First, a resolve to succeed. The art of speaking without notes, like that of swimming without corks, is never acquired by some preachers simply because they lack resolution. They do not believe that the art can be attained by them, and therefore they never try. Gilbert Stuart's recipe for teaching young painters their work may be commended with equal confidence to young preachers. "Teach them just as puppies are taught to swim—chuck them in." "How shall I learn to speak?" some one inquired of Wendell Phillips, to receive his answer in two words only, "Keep speaking."

2. The second essential to success is attention to health. You must learn to keep under the body and bring it into subjection; to play the man as athlete, walker, bather; and to "put a knife to your throat" in the matter of diet before speaking.

3. As a third requisite let us mention regular habits of work. At least one full hour should be

[1] John Hall, D. D., "God's Word through Preaching," p. 272.

set apart for preparation immediately before the delivery of the sermon. This may involve early rising, but that will do you no harm. Be alone previous to the service; keep deacon and sexton at arm's length; and see no visitors.

4. Of still greater importance, as an essential to success, is your rhetorical preparation. Again we must insist that no effort should be made to commit words. Take care of the thought and the words will take care of themselves.

The sermon when ready for delivery may be read once aloud, and if there is a mirror in the room in which to study gesture or facial expression when necessary, so much the better. Once, certainly, it should be read silently. Pause and recapitulate as point after point is gained. Remember Schiller's maxim, "You do not know a subject thoroughly until you can play with it." This process of infixing the sermon on the mind is not a serious one. "When a good sermon is finished on Saturday, a reading that evening and another more hurried on Sabbath morning is sufficient." [1] Only keep at it until you have completely mastered the discourse. "If you are feeling sure of your subject" was William Jay's experience, "you may be quite sure the discourse will go off well; the hard work is done before you get into the pulpit; to the well-prepared man the work is easy there."

5. The fifth essential is one with which no

[1] John Hall, D. D.

preacher can start out on his course. I mean pulpit experience. It is not likely that, in this method of delivery, success will come at once. On the contrary, the preacher who adopts it may be doomed to see himself for a time outstripped by his comrades; and there may be moments when he is tempted to fall back on the manuscript which, like charity, never faileth, or on the extemporaneous address which, in its fluent mediocrity, never runs dry. Let him remember Sir Joshua Reynold's wise words, "Excellence is never granted to men but as the reward of labor." Do not because of transient despondency abandon this method for any other which promises greater ease or readier and more immediate success.

(1) Pulpit experience will in time bring ease. As Emerson says shrewdly, "A great part of courage is the courage of having done the thing before." Learn to concentrate your mind during the delivery of your sermons, and be thankful that previous preparation has given you something upon which to concentrate. Beware of harboring dissipating thought, and do not surrender before the distraction of accidental occurrences. The young preacher need not fear nervousness half as much as he needs to fear the lack of it. "I am now an old man," was Luther's confession, "and I have been a long time employed in the business of preaching, but I never ascend the pulpit without trembling." Yet this was the man whose words were half-battles.

(2) With pulpit experience will come not only self-possession, but also a certain sense of reality which is due to the fact that the sermon is indeed a part of yourself. It has been given to you after personal grappling with the theme and personal labor in the choice of words. Not "I have my sermon," but "I am my sermon," is now your confident persuasion.[1]

(3) Further, pulpit experience may be looked to to give you freedom and vividness of thought and expression. Your mind being stimulated as your speech, you will find some of the very best points in the sermon—sudden felicities of thought and language—come to you for the first time as you deliver your discourse. Do not be afraid of them. They are only late-comers, and should be treated as welcome guests. Put out your hand and take them into the ark. The Lord has neither shut you in, nor shut them out.

(4) I should add that pulpit experience is also likely to bring accuracy. The sermon which has been prepared with a conscience has surely been deeply impressed on your mind. It has reached the memory through the emotions, and therefore it will be most readily reproduced in delivery, often word for word.

It may be well to add that if in delivering the sermon you should find it hard or even impossible to recall some one point, it will be best to make no effort to recover it. Let it go. What you for-

[1] Joseph Parker, D. D., "*Ad Clerum*," p. 45.

get in the flow of speech probably ought to be forgotten. Your mind in the process of preaching is likely to be a better judge as to this, than is your mind in the process of preparation. The point may not be strictly germane to your subject; or it may never have been welded in with the rest; or perhaps it may not have become yours by a personal apprehension of its force and fitness. An honored preacher of our own time confesses that when he prepared his first sermon he had imported into it foreign matter, and he further tells us how he was punished for doing it. "A sermon must have three heads. The first was honestly my own, and the third, but I stole the second from McCheyne. I had no notes, and when I came to preach my sermon, the second had vanished as completely as if it had never been there; and that was the first and last time I ever stole even part of a sermon." In proportion as our material is our own, by discovery and arrangement, shall we have it at our command when we come to deliver our sermon.

In conclusion, we commend the composite method for five reasons:

1. First, because it avoids the objections which can be urged against the methods that we have been considering. The delivery of the sermon is not broken by manuscript; it is not painful, as is too often the case with a memorized discourse; and there is less risk of its becoming careless or ill-balanced than there is with the sermon which is

entirely extemporaneous. "This is an age in which we want the inspiration of the extemporator, gazing face to face at his hearers, combined with the fullness and exactness of a written sermon. We want the accuracy and finish of the written discourse, with the freshness of thought worked out in the presence of living faces." [1]

2. We commend it, further, because it seems to combine the largest number of excellencies. As much as the read sermon it has weight and exactness; as much as the memorized sermon it has rhetorical finish; and as much as the extemporaneous sermon it has ease and freshness and fertility of resource.

A lord chancelor of England holds that since preaching is only a department of the art of rhetoric, sermons ought to be carefully prepared, and he considers that "the best sermons are those which are carefully written out, and afterward delivered as if extempore." The pulpit agrees with the bar in this decision, at least it does so in the person of one of its greatest living ornaments. Dr. Joseph Parker thinks that young preachers "should write their sermons with the greatest possible care and industry, and then put them away before preaching."

3. We commend the method because it furnishes the preacher with a store of useful material. The sermon is not lost. We should however be careful on each occasion of its re-delivery to work it

[1] Davies, "Successful Preachers," p. 154.

over carefully, and enrich it with the fruits of our latest reading and ripest thought. On the question of recovering what has been prepared, Dr. John Hall says, "A couple of hours is quite enough to repossess one's self of the right kind of sermon written twenty years ago." [1]

4. While all methods of delivery are unequal we may probably claim for the composite plan that it insures a tolerably uniform level of excellence. From the sense of comparative failure no preacher can ever be completely free, and there will no doubt be times of profound depression under a conviction that the failure has been utter and unrelieved. But considering the high level on which the composite method moves, it may fairly be affirmed that the measure of uniformity which it reaches in (say) a year of preaching, is in its favor.

5. Finally, we commend the composite method because it does the most complete justice to the great work of preaching. The importance of our vocation demands the exactness of written preparation. "A word thoughtlessly uttered may carry in it consequences of which at the moment we little dream." Equally, however, does it demand that we so preach that human nature should be most powerfully affected. We have no right to dispense with the reality, directness, and power of free speech, the crown and flower of eloquence. Our last word therefore is in favor of accurate preparation and free delivery.

[1] "God's Word Through Preaching," p. 141.

THE PREACHER AND HIS HEARER

SUMMARY

Eloquent hearing as necessary as eloquent speaking.

I. Importance of Obtaining such a Hearing.

1. This is possible. Illustrations from the History of Preaching.
2. It is essential to our doing our best work.
3. Yet there are hindrances to effectual hearing: (1) A natural repugnance to religion; (2) Natural inattention of most hearers; (3) An indisposition to think consecutively; (4) The hearer's lack of previous information as to the subject of the discourse; (5) A poor sermon or a prejudice against the preacher.

II. How such a Hearing may be Obtained.

1. By attention to the preparation of the sermon. Prepare it with the audience in view: (1) In the choice of a theme; (2) In the composition of the sermon: First, interest. (*a*) Do not create a feeling of distaste; (*b*) Aim to interest all classes; Second, instruct; Third, convince; Fourth, inspire.
2. By attention to the delivery of the sermon: (1) It should be suitable to the occasion; (2) It should be sympathetic; (3) It should be earnest.

XXIII

THE PREACHER AND HIS HEARER

Conclusion

Up to this time we have been chiefly interested in the preacher and his sermon. Before we close our discussion it will be well that something should be said as to the third essential to a successful presentation of truth, I mean the congregation. Eloquent hearing is needed to-day no less than is eloquent speaking. This no doubt is what is meant by the injunction so often on the lips of Jesus, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."[1] When Dr. F. J. A. Hort writes of F. D. Maurice, "I have thought for years that he is intelligible and profitable to a person so far as that person needs him and no farther," he expresses a truth which is capable of very wide application. We also must stimulate the craving for truth, and alike in stimulating and satisfying we shall find our reward in what for our present purpose we will call eloquent hearing.

I. First, then let us glance at the importance of obtaining an attentive and responsive hearing. How important this is will be evident if we consider that more perhaps than any other form of address the sermon is of immediate moment.

[1] Matt. 11 : 15 ; Mark 4 : 9, 23 ; Luke 8 : 8.

Because, as Richard Hooker says, the sermon "spends its life at its birth"; with the preacher it is "now or never."

1. The whole history of the Christian pulpit furnishes abundant proof that it is possible for the preacher to obtain the hearing of which we are now speaking. Jesus had it. Preaching at Nazareth, in his early ministry, as he spoke, the eyes of all that were in the synagogue were fastened on him; and when that ministry drew to its close, as he walked with two of his disciples and opened to them the Scriptures, their hearts burned within them.[1] The apostles and first preachers had it. To this the sermons of Peter and Paul, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, bear witness. Later preachers have had it also. "Better that the sun should cease to shine," cried the throngs at Constantinople, "than that our Chrysostom's mouth should be stopped." As Savonarola exposes the evils which threaten Florence, the disciple who is taking notes of his master's discourse can write no longer. "At this place I was so overcome by weeping that I could not go on." The churchwardens of St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, find themselves under the necessity of paying the carpenter "for mending of divers pews that were broken when Dr. Latimer did preach." A Cambridge student gives a boy a few half-pence to hold his horse while he follows a crowd of peasants on the village green who are flocking to hear

[1] Luke 4 : 20; Luke 24 : 32.

"one Bunyan, a tinker, prate." As he listens he vows that he wishes never to hear any other preacher than he. To the Connecticut farmer pushing his way to the place where Whitefield is preaching "like one of the old aposels," "every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear the good news from heaven for the saving of their souls."

2. Such a hearing is essential if our ministry is to do its best work. The minister shows his wisdom when he guards against the subtle and plausible vanity "which courts a compliment or is fed by it." When some one told John Bunyan at the close of a religious service that he had preached a good sermon, the answer was "Yes, the devil told me that before I came down from the pulpit." "It is not good," says manly Phillips Brooks, "that the minister should be worshiped and made an oracle. It is still worse that he should be flattered and made a pet." But the knowledge that in his congregation he has devout and intelligent hearers who listen for his sake as well as for their own, is unspeakably helpful to the preacher if he is a true man. Happy indeed is he who can with reason cherish it. John Foster, detailing to a correspondent his early experience in the pulpit, writes: "I have involuntarily caught a habit of looking too much on the right hand side of the meeting. 'Tis on account of about half a dozen sensible fellows who sit together there." To his friend John Greene, Robert Hall said, with his

wonted frankness, "O sir, I could always tell when my people were pleased and when the subject told, from their manner of hearing." It was the general fervor of the congregations which gave such acceptance to the sermons of the preachers during the evangelical awakening of the eighteenth century, and this in a large measure accounts for the eagerness with which discourses were then received, which are "curiously flat, formal, and unimpressive" to us when we occasionally disturb the dust of a century in order to get at them. Spurgeon reveals the secret of their efficacy when he says, "I have listened to many sermons from preachers called poor, in all corners of the country, and I never heard one which did not teach me something, if I was in the spirit to profit by it." The mediæval legend commemorates a popular preacher under whose sermons numbers were converted, and to whom it was revealed that not to what he said were these effects due so much as to the prayers of a poor and obscure peasant who sat on the pulpit steps, and poured out his heart in prayer for a blessing on the message which was being delivered. And George Herbert, in his own quaint way, points our thoughts even higher than the pulpit steps when he sings of preachers:

> The worst speaks something good; if all lack sense,
> God takes a text and preacheth patience.

3. Yet it is evident that there are many hindrances in the way of this effectual hearing. Let

us inquire what causes conduce to make it a thing so rare to find and so hard to retain as it seems to be.

(1) Perhaps we must mention first among these, a natural repugnance to religion. To a parishioner who told Archbishop Whately that he thought a person should not go to church to be made uncomfortable, the apt reply was, that while this was true, yet whether it was the sermon or the man's life that should be altered so as to avoid the discomfort must depend on whether the doctrine was right or wrong. And be it remembered that, however much the claims of religion are neglected, despised, or challenged, it has remained an incontrovertible fact all through time that there is no other subject of such widespread, profound, and abiding interest as religion.

(2) Something should also be granted on account of the natural inattention of most hearers. No doubt the great preachers to whom we have referred succeeded in absorbing the attention of their congregations so that for the time they held them spell-bound; but the large majority of speakers, whether from pulpit or platform or stage, have this trouble of inattention to contend with. The mind is very easily turned aside by external circumstances. Even Chrysostom needs to remonstrate: "I am expounding the Scriptures, and you all turn your eyes to the lamps, and to him who is lighting them. What negligence is this to forsake me, and fix your minds on him!" But

Chrysostom should have understood human nature better than to lose his temper. Sydney Smith wittily said what every preacher knows to be true: "A sparrow fluttering about the church is an antagonist which the most profound theologian in Europe is wholly unable to overcome." There is a certain sequence in the very inconsequence of Samuel Pepys when he wrote in his diary one Lord's Day in January, 1660: "To church in the afternoon, where a lazy poor sermon. This day I began to put on buckles to my shoes." A little later when Dr. Samuel Johnson looks over a London congregation, he says in his gruff way: "The men are thinking of their money, I suppose, and the women of their mops." Even courteous Longfellow has to acknowledge to himself in his journal: "I cannot always listen to the clergyman." Luther preached a duty which he himself would have been the last man to practise when he said: "If God speaketh to thee as he did to Balaam—by the mouth of an ass—thou must have so much patience as to hear him." With much more reason Professor Huxley, who had not the hearing of sermons in mind either, wrote: "An ineradicable tendency to think of something else makes me an excellent test-object for orators." Probably in the discussions which are periodically waged on the decline of the pulpit, not enough allowance has been made for obstacles to good hearing other than those which are furnished by either the preacher or the discourse. Something needs to

be said as to the physical condition of the hearer, and still more on the state of mind in which he comes to church. The heavy meal, the hurried pace due to Sunday lateness, the multifarious and often ignoble contents of the morning newspaper, a thermometer which registers in the eighties, a close, ill-ventilated building, these are hindrances to effectual hearing for which no preacher ought to be held wholly responsible.

(3) To this may be added a certain inability to think long upon any one subject. The spirit of Martha may enter into Mary at the very time when she sits at the Master's feet. With its many petty details, much serving diverts the mind from much thinking. It is not so much lack of interest in the subject upon which the preacher is speaking as it is lack of power to think on anything whatever consecutively. James Mill, for so many years in the service of the East India Company, says that his intercourse with the directors taught him to cultivate "the mode of putting a thought which gives it easiest admittance into minds not prepared for it by habit." The majority of devout persons in our congregations have probably felt much more than they have thought about religion, and sometimes they seem to resent an appeal to their intelligence almost as though they suspected the preacher of an attempt to impose upon them a duty which they have paid him to perform for them.

(4) We need, further, to make full allowance for

the fact that as a rule the hearer is entirely in the dark as to what subject the preacher has selected for his discourse. What he has been revolving for a week, is to the congregation altogether new. It is unreasonable to expect that they will be able at once, on the announcing of his text and theme, to adapt their pace to his. He moves with the velocity acquired by hours of previous study. Dr. R. W. Dale, it is said, allowed himself fifteen years to get a new idea into the minds of his congregation; and yet as a consequence of long and careful listening to the best kind of sermons, his people were better prepared than are most hearers to grasp a thought and apprehend its various bearings.

(5) Honesty compels me to add that a poor sermon or perhaps a not altogether groundless prejudice against the preacher himself, may account for his not gaining the attention of a congregation. An uninteresting theme, or unworthy treatment of it, an awkward or unseemly delivery, a failure on the part of the speaker to commend himself to his hearers—are all of them obstacles to be numbered among the hindrances to effectual hearing.

In what has been said under this divison of our subject my aim has been to impress the preacher alike with the importance and the difficulty of winning "the hearing ear." Unquestionably it is one of the prime elements in his power in the pulpit. We refuse to take Luther seriously when he says that as he stands in the pulpit he imagines

that all heads before him are simply blocks of wood. To think that would be fatal to successful speech. Cicero's maxim is perpetually true, "*Non est magnus orator sine multitudine audiente.*" As an orator, Mr. Gladstone rarely failed to illustrate his own words, "The speaker receives from his audience in a vapor what he pours back on them in a flood." Beecher is of the same mind: "An audience always puts me in possession of everything I have got. There is nothing in the world that is such a stimulus to me. It wakes up the power of thinking and of imagination in me." The man who listens to a discourse which, although probably in words far better than he could command, expresses his own experience, or perhaps discovers to him some train of thought which has been in his own mind before, although he was only dimly conscious of its presence, seems all the while to be hearing his own better self. This was what the church-goers of an earlier generation meant when they said in commendation of a sermon that they "heard well"; and it is what Lowell puts into homely verse when he writes:

> To him 'tis granted
> Always to say the word that's wanted,
> So that he seems but speaking clearer
> The tip-top thought of every hearer.

II. How may such a hearing be obtained? Briefly, we answer, By paying the proper attention to the preparation and delivery of the sermon.

1. In dealing first with the preparation of the sermon let me repeat that the preacher must learn to prepare it with his audience in view.

(1) Do this, for one thing, in the choice of your theme. Take subjects upon which either light or leading is needed. Select topics that are of immediate interest. "The man who is out of gear with his own times, cannot interest others."[1] Learn to set aside your own tastes and instead to consult those of what Phillips Brooks happily calls that "strange composite being, the congregation." Remember that the limitations of Scripture are the only boundaries which you need to respect in this important matter of finding something to speak about. Be like the Scottish preacher of whom it is written: "He stood always at the foot of the cross, but from that center he swept the circumference of active life."[2] By all means let your selection be made with an eye to the highest interests of the congregation. Commenting on the words "For you Gentiles,"[3] Dr. R. W. Dale notes how they suggest the personal element in Paul's work. "It was for the sake of persons—Gentiles, living men and women—that he preached the gospel, and for their sakes he was a prisoner." And then he adds: "In a book on preaching by a distinguished French priest, which I read some years ago, it was laid down as the first essential that the preacher should love his congregation.

[1] Bishop Fraser, Manchester, England.
[2] Dr. W. Anderson, Glasgow. [3] Eph. 3 : 1.

There is truth in that." So to a popular preacher with whom he was conversing, Doctor Bonar said, "You love to preach, don't you?" and when he received the answer, "Yes, I do," put this further question, "But do you love the men to whom you preach?" It is this affectionate solicitude for the true interests of his congregation that we catch in Andrew Fuller's soliloquy in his study:

> I am expected to preach, it may be, to some hundreds of people, some of whom may come several miles to hear; and what have I to say to them? Is it for me to sit here studying a text merely to find something to say to fill up the hour? I may do this without imparting any useful instruction, without commending myself to any man's conscience, and without winning, or even aiming to win, one soul to Christ. It is possible there may be in the audience a poor miserable creature, laboring under the load of a guilty conscience. If he depart without being told how to obtain rest for his soul, what may be the consequence? Or, it may be, some stranger may be there who has never heard the way of salvation in his life. If he should depart without hearing it now, and should die before another opportunity occurs, how shall I meet him at the bar of God? Possibly some one of my constant hearers may die in the following week; and is there nothing I should wish to say to him before his departure? It may be that I myself may die before another Lord's Day: this may be the last time that I shall ascend the pulpit; and have I no important testimony to leave with the people of my care?

He who girds himself for his task in such a spirit as this will not fail to preach sermons in which as Longfellow said, "One can hear the heart beat."

(2) The preacher should also realize his audience in the composition of his sermon. There are four things certainly which you should aim to do in every discourse that you compose. Let me enumerate them. First, interest your hearers. I put this first because unless a sermon interests, it fails to receive attention, and no profit can come from it. Like the picture in the gallery which catches no eye, it is there and yet not there. What Wilkie Collins says of books is just as true of sermons. "I never get any good out of a book that did not interest me in the first instance." On the other hand, what a testimony Arthur Stanley, then a schoolboy of fourteen at Rugby, paid to Doctor Arnold's power to interest, when, after hearing him preach, he returned to his room, and wrote the sermon out from memory. In the composition of your sermon, therefore, do nothing to offend a reasonable taste. Choose your words so as to respect the proper limit of pulpit discourse. Handle solemn subjects with solemnity, and delicate subjects delicately. Often suggest rather than paint. Leave the imagination to supply details when physical conditions are to be touched upon. Nothing can be more repulsive than an elaborate description of the crucifixion, or of the suffering on a death-bed, or of the terrors and torments of the lost.

Let it be your ambition to interest all classes of hearers. Aiming below rather than above the average intelligence of your congregation, see to

it that thought is clear and language plain. Instead of saying "Do you understand me?"—implying that there is a lack of quickness on the part of your hearers, say rather, "Do I make myself understood?" and so lay the blame of obscurity where in all likelihood it belongs. No doubt it is "the mixture of people who are to be fed with the same food which in reality constitutes the great difficulty of sermons."[1] But this difficulty may be met and overcome if you remember to appeal in your sermon to the intuitions of the soul, to the dictates of the conscience, and to the practical habits of daily life. These three—aspiration, righteousness, usefulness—if they are well handled never fail to touch the great majority of those who are listening to you. It is not enough, however, to interest. You must, secondly, endeavor to instruct. "The only real point of preaching," as Francis de Sales says, "is the overthrow of sin and the increase of righteousness." And yet in order to attain to this consummation we need to regard, first of all, the truth of what we are saying, and then, as a secondary matter, the effect which we think it will produce.[2] By all means have a distinct purpose in each sermon that you compose. Pulpit power comes not as a cause but as a consequence. It follows from first enriching the hearer with knowledge. "Feed the flock of God." It is indeed well that the intellect be reached by way

[1] Bishop Harvey Goodwin.

[2] Nettleship, "Moral Influence of Literature," p. 18.

of the heart; but it is necessary that it should be reached somehow. Our congregations have minds as well as hearts. Dr. Archibald Alexander does well to warn us against too hastily assuming that in what would be considered an intelligent congregation "all the members are well-informed persons." It is far wiser courteously to assume that our congregations are ignorant as to the matters about which we discourse in the pulpit, than complimentarily to assume that they are thoroughly acquainted with them. There is always more advantage when we presume upon ignorance than there is when we presume upon knowledge.

While interesting and instructing, the preacher, during the composition of his sermon, should also, thirdly, aim to convince. I may be allowed to quote again from Francis de Sales. His father, who had very lofty conceptions of the dignity of sermons, remonstrated with his son for preaching often. "Even on week days the bells go. It used not to be so in my day. Sermons were much rarer. But then, to be sure, God knows those were something like sermons—full of learning, well got up, more Latin and Greek in one than you stick into a dozen." The answer of Francis gives us the key to his great success as a missionary preacher: "My test of the worth of a preacher is when his congregation go away saying not 'what a beautiful sermon,' but 'I will do something.'" If this impulse to do something is the evidence that the preacher has persuaded by con-

vincing, the most solid and satisfactory results will be likely to follow. The hearer will be built up, and will continue in the faith as one who is grounded and settled.[1] "It was said of Dr. R. W. Dale, as contrasted with his predecessor, John Angell James, that while they both aimed to persuade, the older man would use any method in order to succeed in doing this, while the younger "believed that no persuasion was of lasting value which was not based on intellectual conviction."

If you interest, instruct, and convince your hearers, it is safe to say that the fourth requisite to a successful sermon will not be wanting in your composition. It will inspire. Is not this where so many sermons fail? They do not quicken, stimulate, and uplift. So congregations complain that with all its excellence the discourse is often a weariness to the flesh, and the satirist, incarnating the sermon, puts his own sneer into its lips:

> With sacred dullness ever in my view,
> Sleep at my bidding creeps from pew to pew.

This power to rouse, this vitality which makes the sermon, as Luther says, "a thing with hands and feet," will come as a consequence of the oratorical temperament of the speaker, and of the skillful choice which he makes of his material for pulpit use, and of the lofty plane which he assumes in his ministry and the momentous themes upon which he discourses, and of the spiritual power,

[1] Col. 1 : 23.

the unction from on high, which he himself enjoys. So preaching will become not only what Vinet called it, "an action," but what he himself often succeeded in making it, an inspiration.

2. The eloquent hearing depends not alone on the preparation of the sermon. As much, and perhaps more, it depends on its delivery.

(1) For one thing, the delivery of the sermon should be suitable to the occasion. Pulpit decorum—the taste which is so grateful when it is found and the lack of which many of our hearers perceive although unable to account for their feeling of dissatisfaction—has not been sufficiently considered in enumerating the elements of a preacher's power or the secret of his failure. It is possible that a deficiency in early training, or some personal peculiarities, or a natural indifference to minor matters, may make the word as we preach it unfruitful. Neglect no legitimate means which lie in your power for seeing yourself as others see you. Never suffer yourself to become careless as to what may seem only trifles in your pulpit manners. Abstain from allusions to yourself. Assume no ministerial airs or pulpit tone of brief authority. Above all, aim to be hidden behind your theme in the spirit of one whose highest honor it is to preach not himself but Christ Jesus his Lord. No pulpit is small enough for the preacher who brings into it himself alone, and none large enough for him who brings into it not himself but his Master. Here let me add as a

practical suggestion that in addressing your audience you use no one form invariably, and any form sparingly. The Scripture terms, "My friends,"[1] My "brethren,"[2] "Men and brethren,"[3] "Sirs,"[4] will probably answer all ordinary purposes.

(2) While the preacher's delivery should be suitable to the occasion, it is equally important that it should be sympathetic. Assume that your hearers have come prepared to listen, as on your part you have come prepared to speak.[5] Be more and more in touch with your congregation as the discourse proceeds. At first it is natural that you should be concerned chiefly with the sermon, but as you warm to that you should find yourself coming into closer and closer contact with all who are listening to you. If the first third of the half-hour belongs to the sermon and the congregation, the two-thirds which remain should belong rather to the congregation and the sermon. Happy is the preacher who is able to individualize his hearers, so that each one believes that he himself is especially addressed. An honest scholar hearing Zwingli preach, felt "as if the preacher was pulling him by the hair." As he spoke, the congregation would often grow restless under the spell of this conviction, and sometimes one and another would even make his resentment manifest. "Neighbor," Zwingli would interpose, "I did not mean it for thee more than for myself."

[1] Luke 12 : 4. [2] Acts 3 : 17. [3] Acts 1 : 16. [4] Acts 14 : 15.
[5] Acts 26 : 1.

Of Rowland Hill it was said, in the same way, that if you sat in the back seat in the gallery while he was preaching, you would be persuaded that what he said was directed especially to you. No doubt this effect is due in part to a sympathetic tone in the voice, but far more is it owing to a sympathetic chord in the heart.

(3) So, in conclusion, I would say, let your manner be earnest as well as suitable and sympathetic. Avoid all flippancy, jesting, and trifling. Covet the "blood earnestness" which characterized Bunyan and Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Chalmers. Preach as did Francis of Assisi, "compelled by the imperious need of kindling others with the flame that burned within himself"; and as did Richard Baxter,

> As though he ne'er would preach again,
> And as a dying man to dying men."

Thus will you belong to the last of the three classes into which Archbishop Magee divided preachers: First, the preacher you cannot listen to; second, the preacher you can listen to; third, the preacher you cannot help listening to; and by you—dealing with a loftier theme and speaking for a vaster future—the tribute which Ben Jonson pays to Lord Bacon may be not undeserved: "No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. The fear of every man who heard him was lest he should make an end."

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